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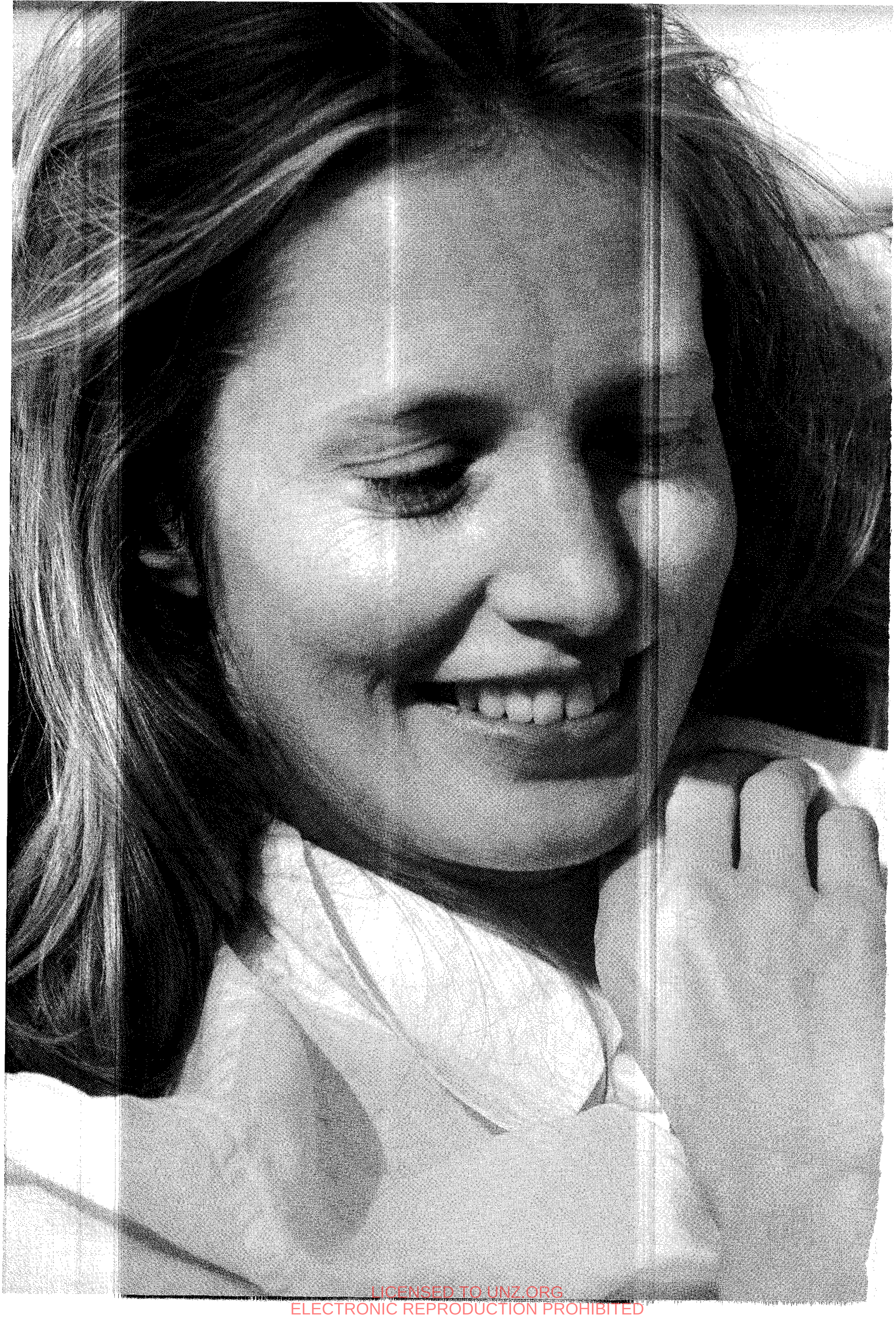

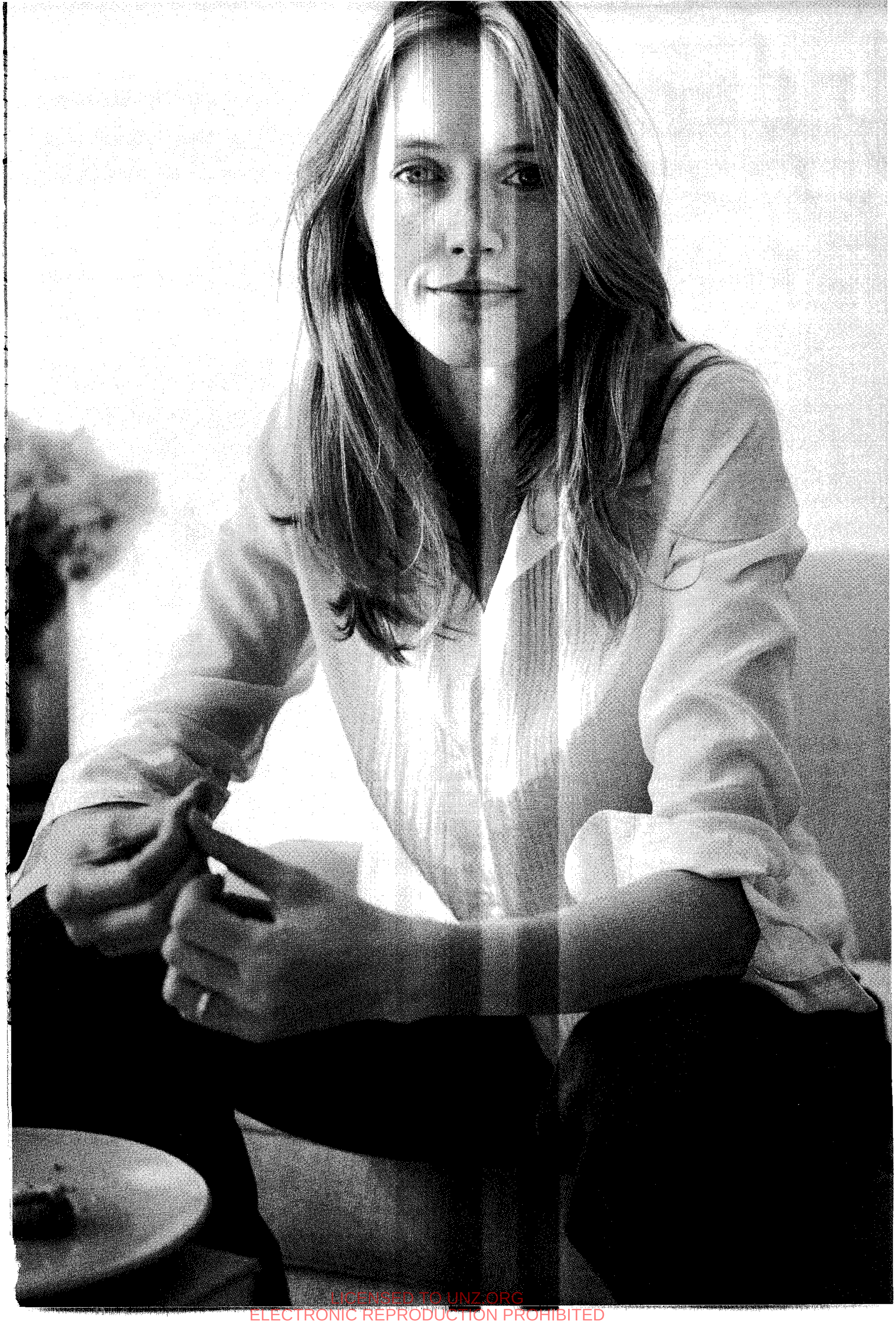

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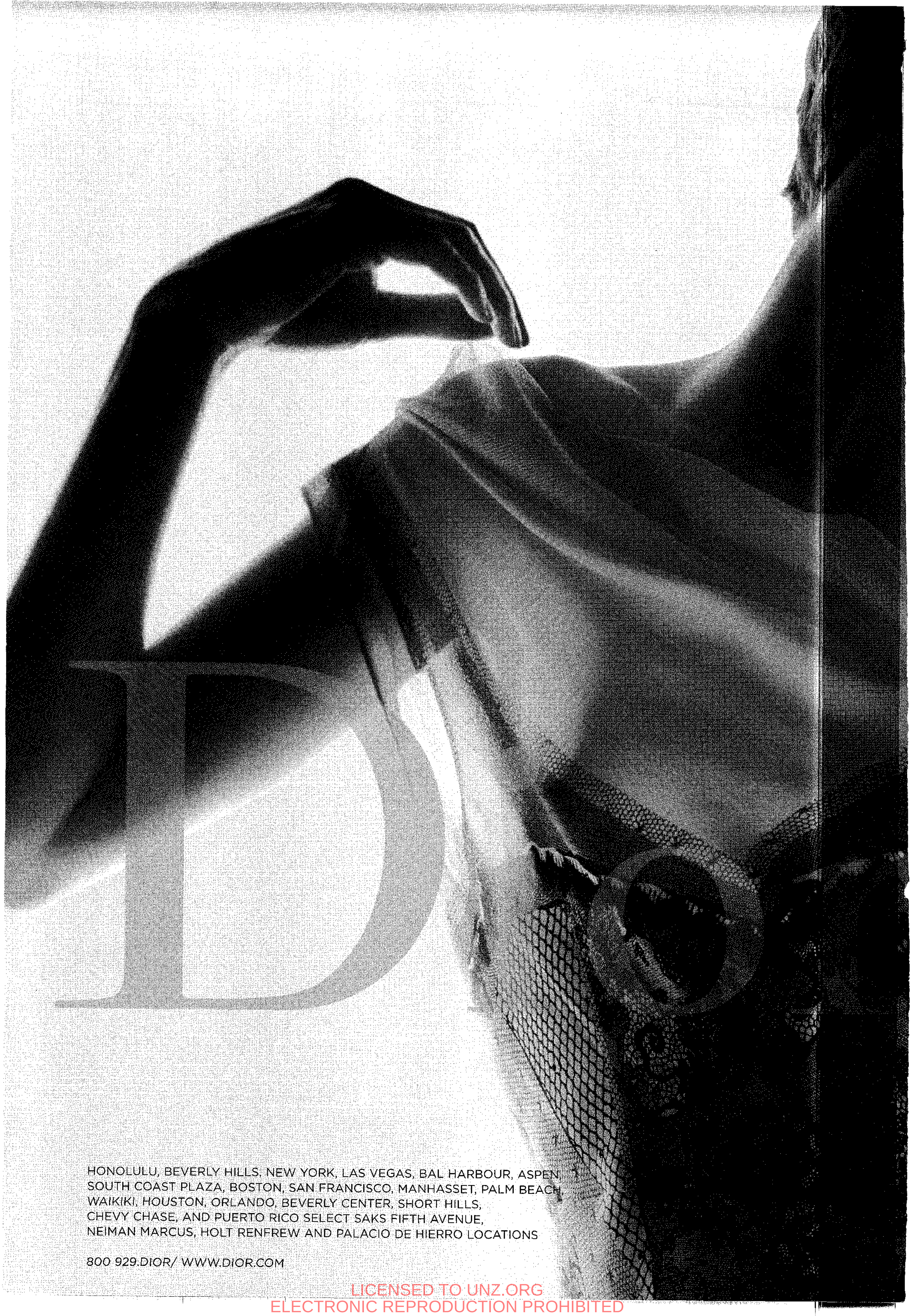

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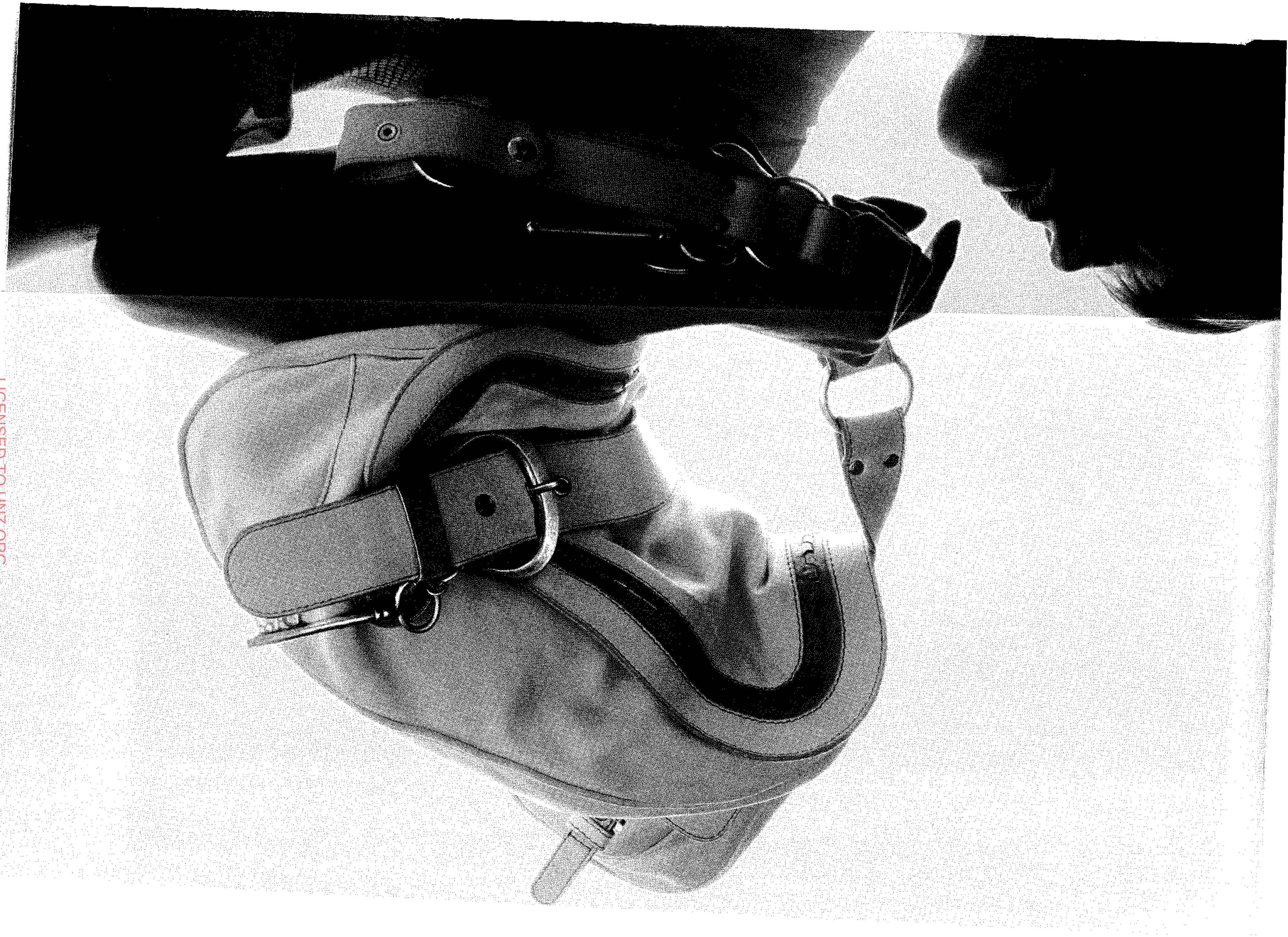

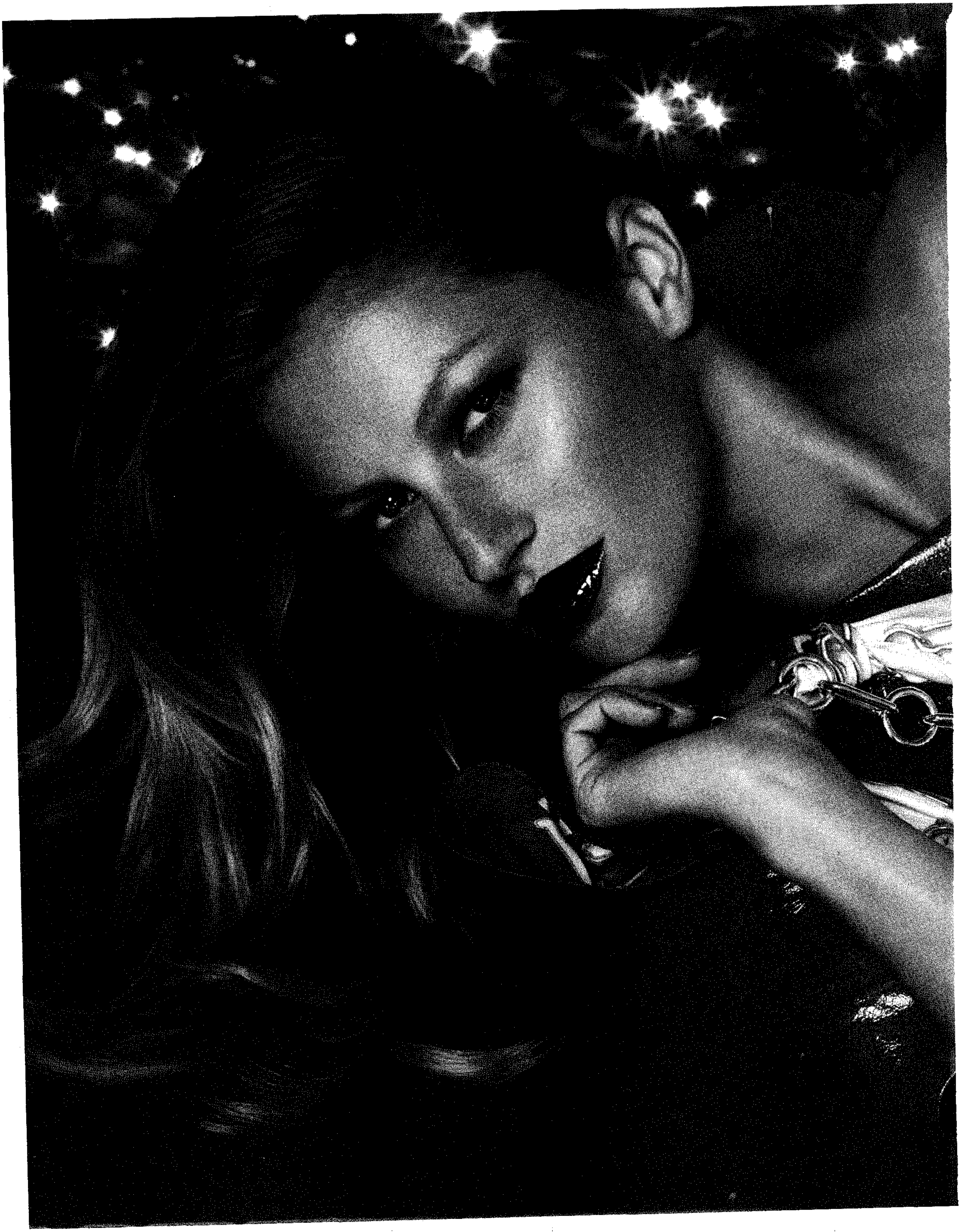

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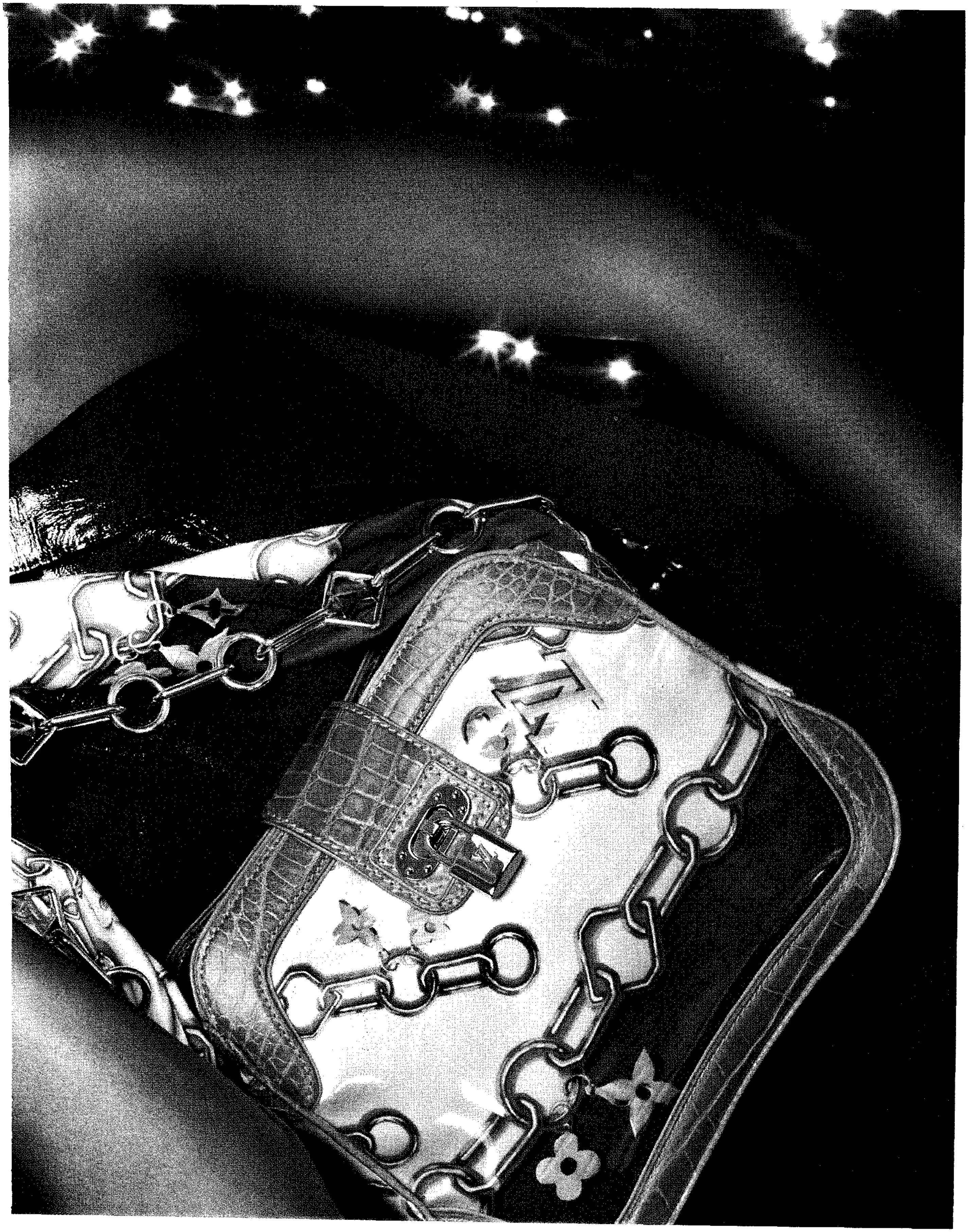

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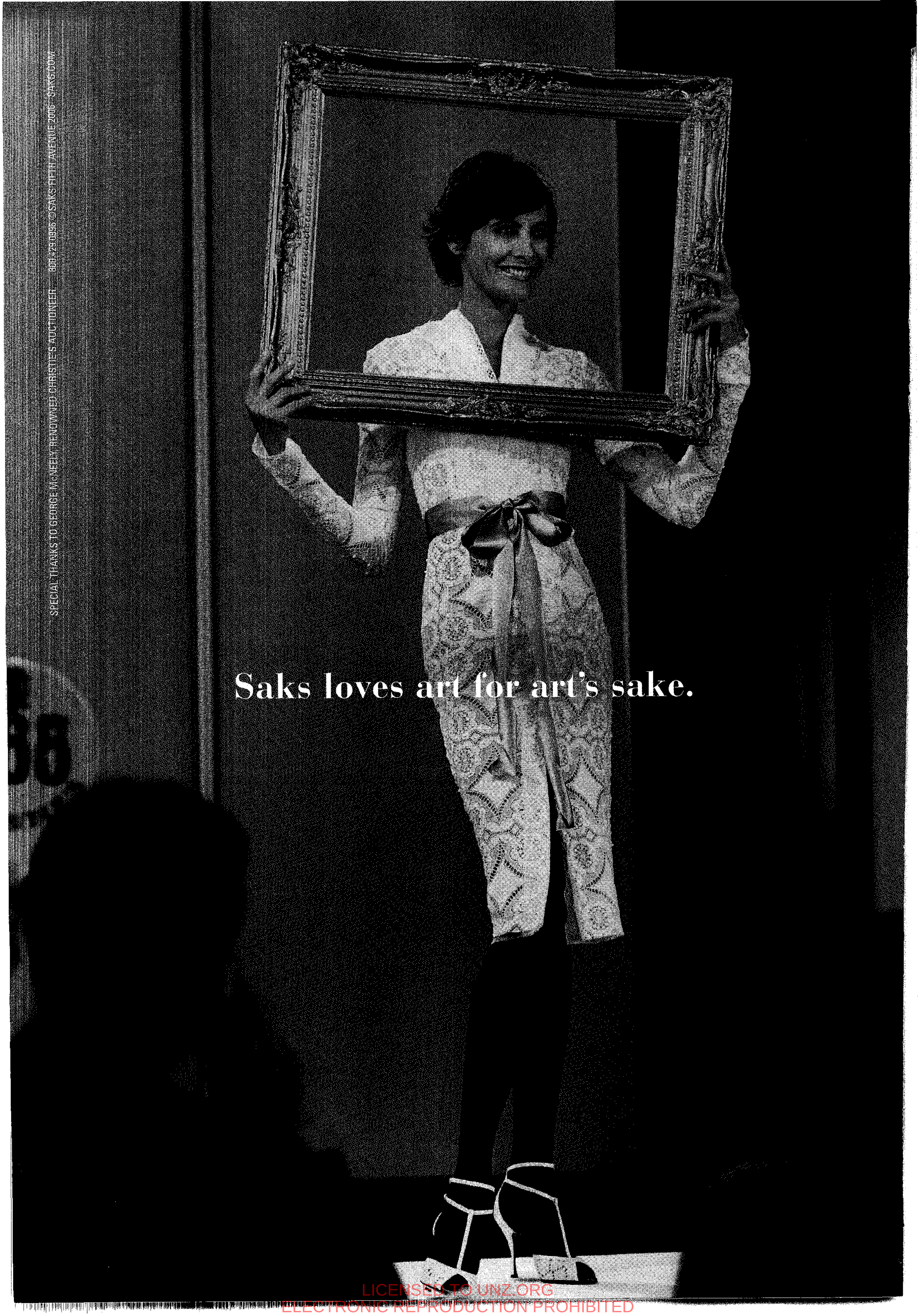
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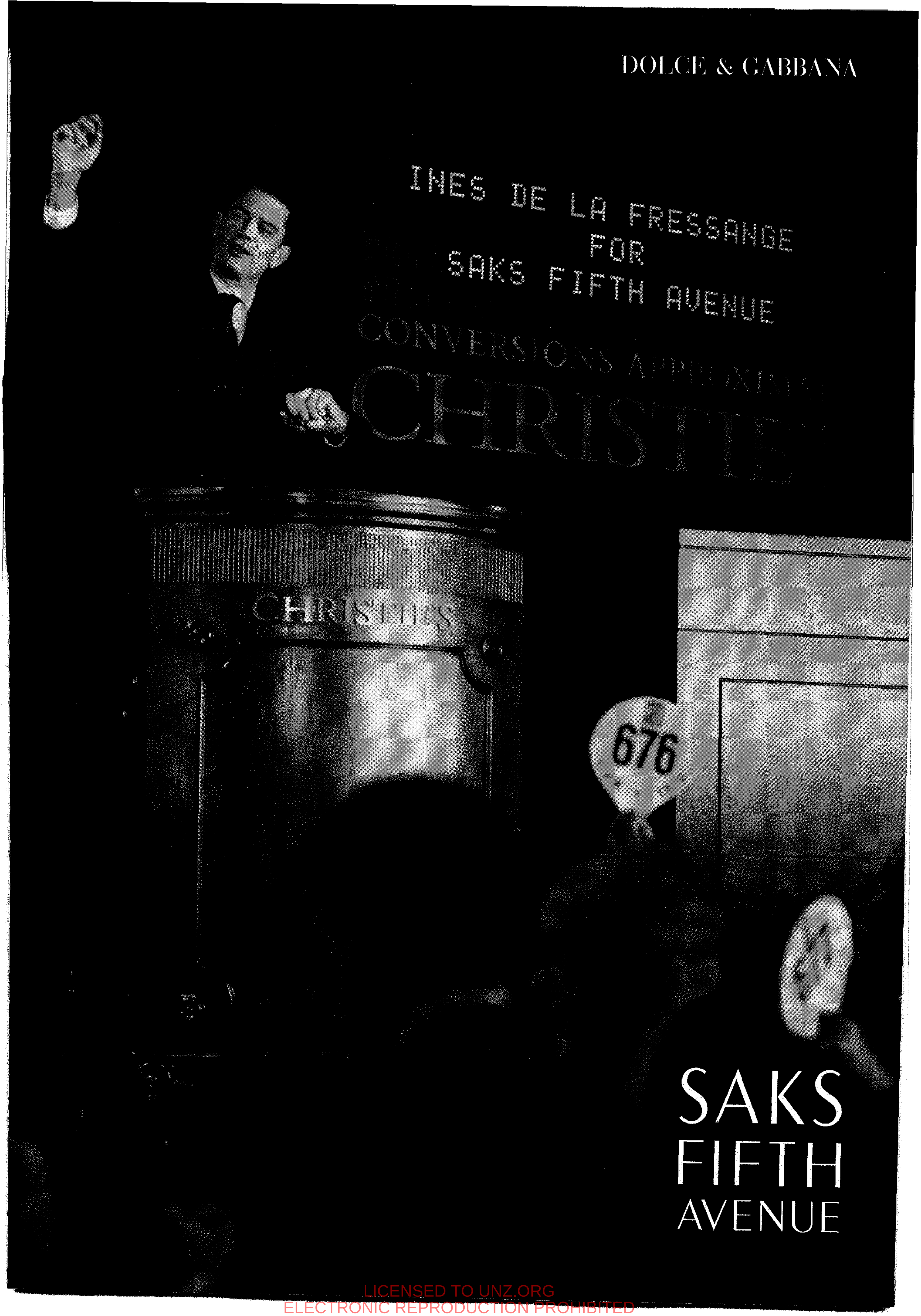
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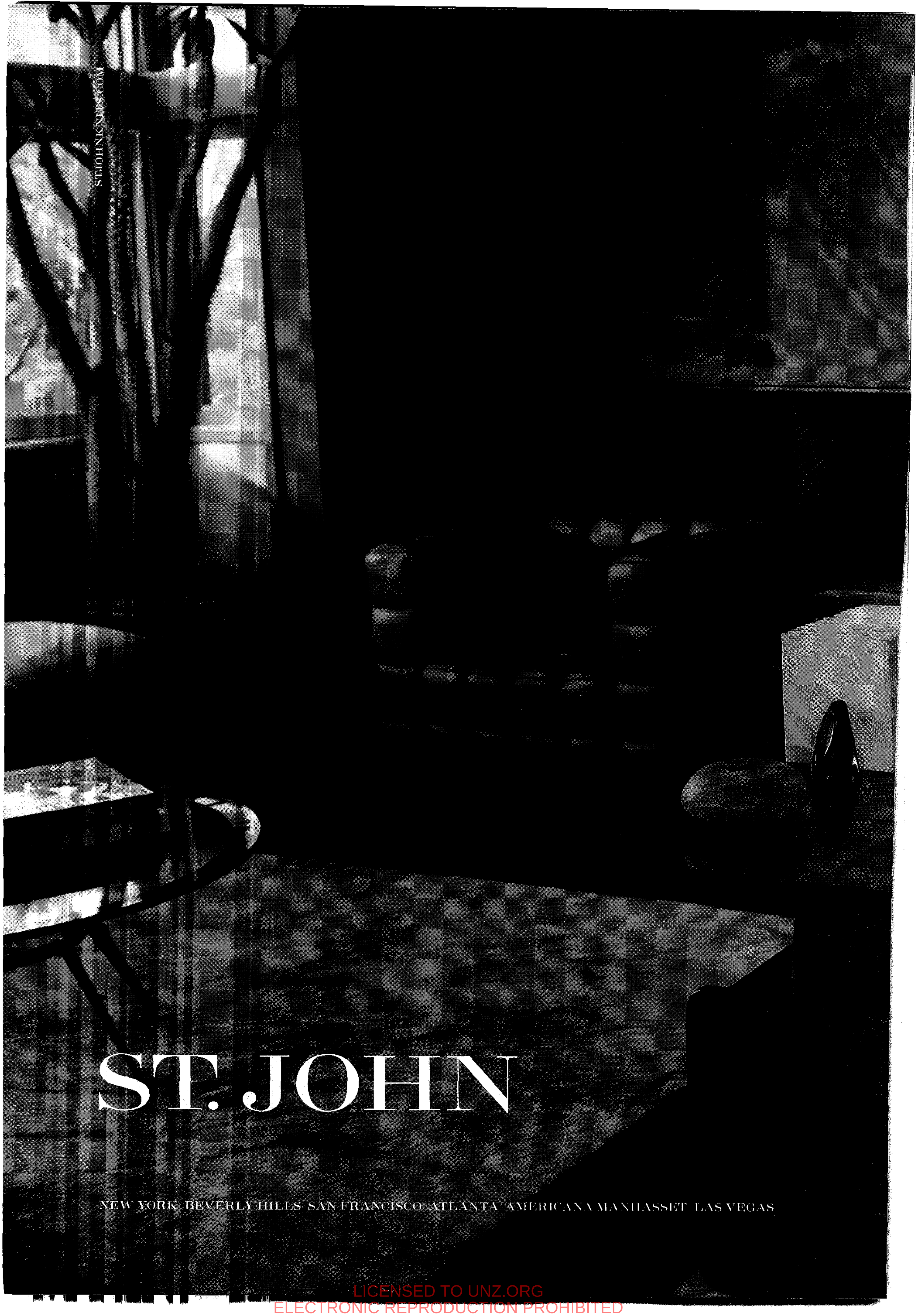
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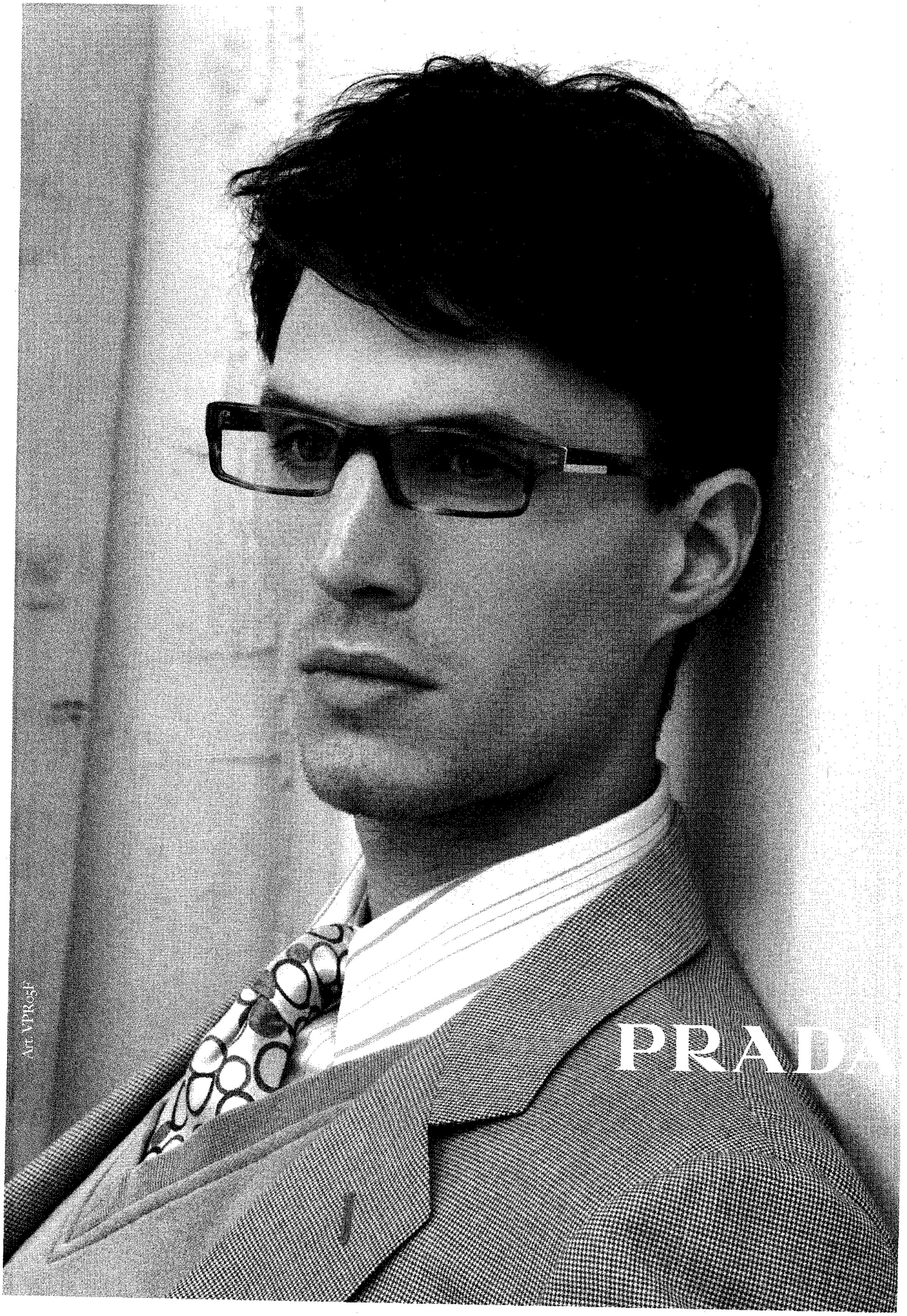
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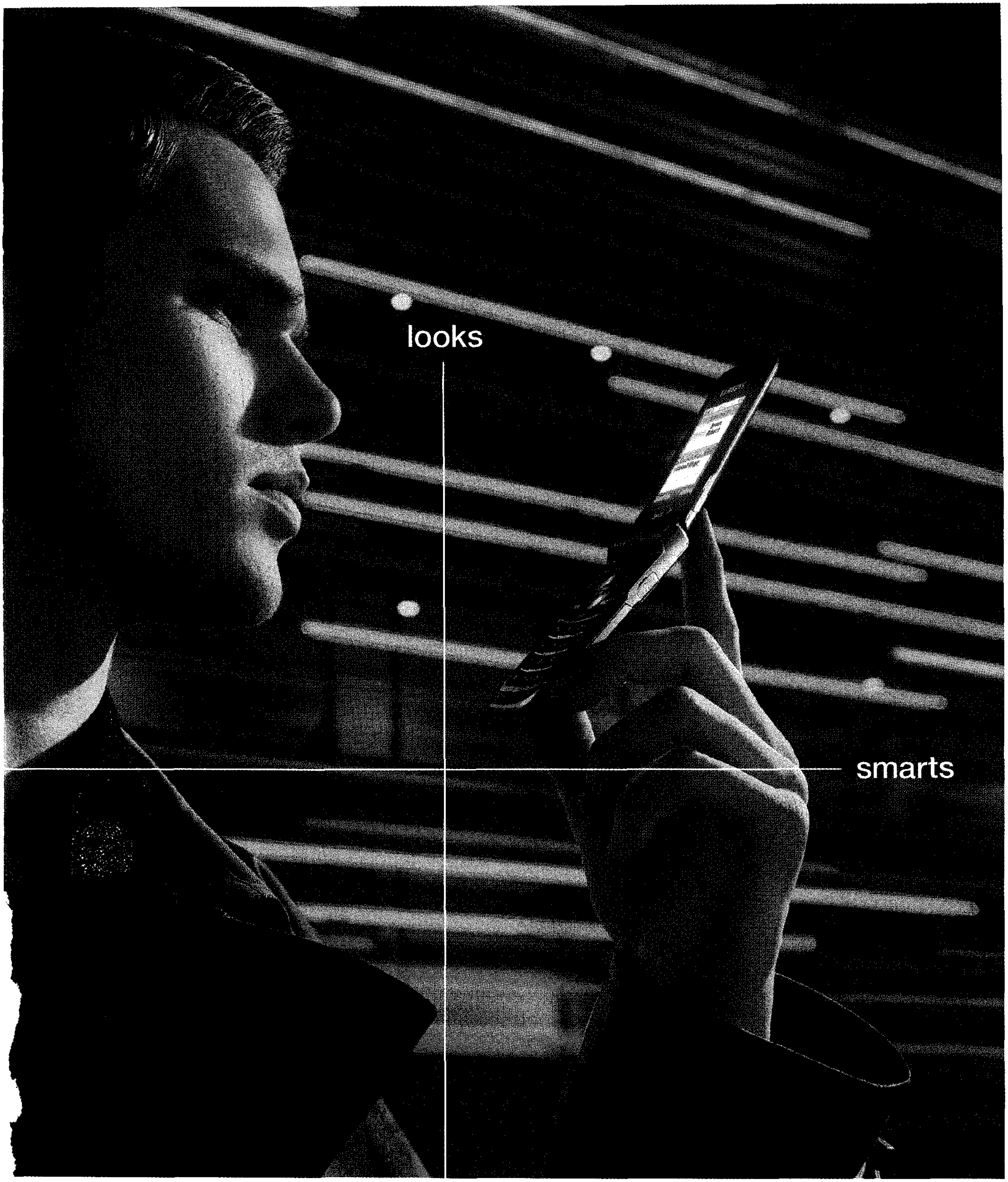

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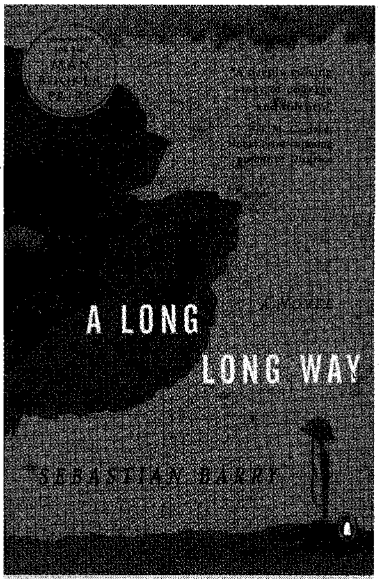

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 67) is a political correspondent for the magazine and the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change," which has just been published.

Patricia Marx ("To Shop and Drive in L.A.," p. 76) writes for film and television and teaches comedy writing at New York University.

Louise Erdrich (Fiction, p. 118) has published eleven novels, including "The Painted Drum," which came out in September.

John Colapinto ("The Alchemist," p. 88) is the author of "As Nature Made Him" and the novel "About the Author."

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 68; "The Utopians," p. 108) is a staff writer.

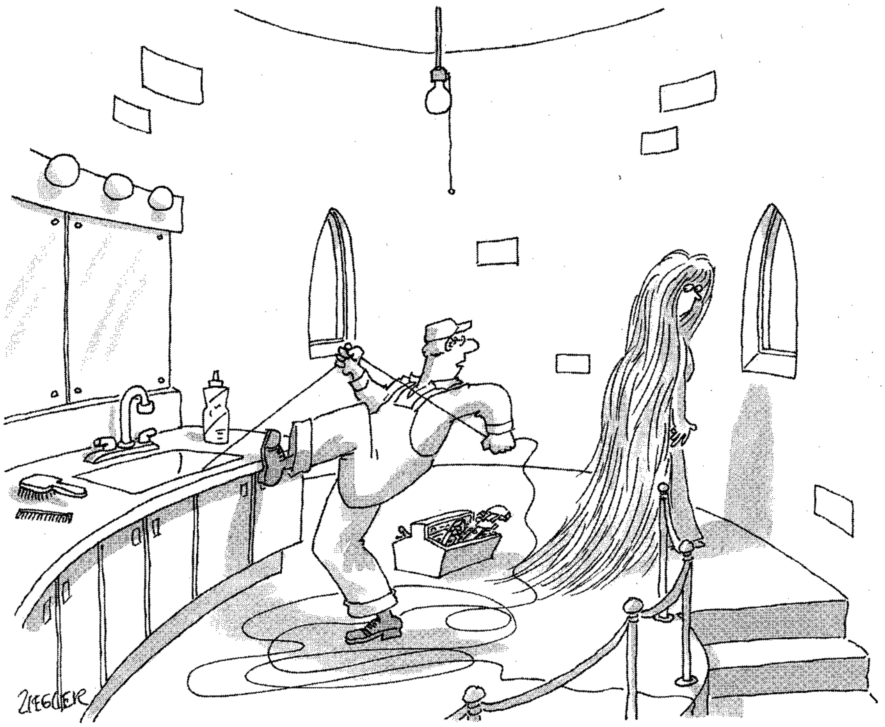
Seamus Heaney (Poems, pp. 94, 113, 129, 138) received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. "District and Circle," a new collection of poems, comes out in May.

Jack Handey (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 86) is the author of "Deep Thoughts," a series of humor books.

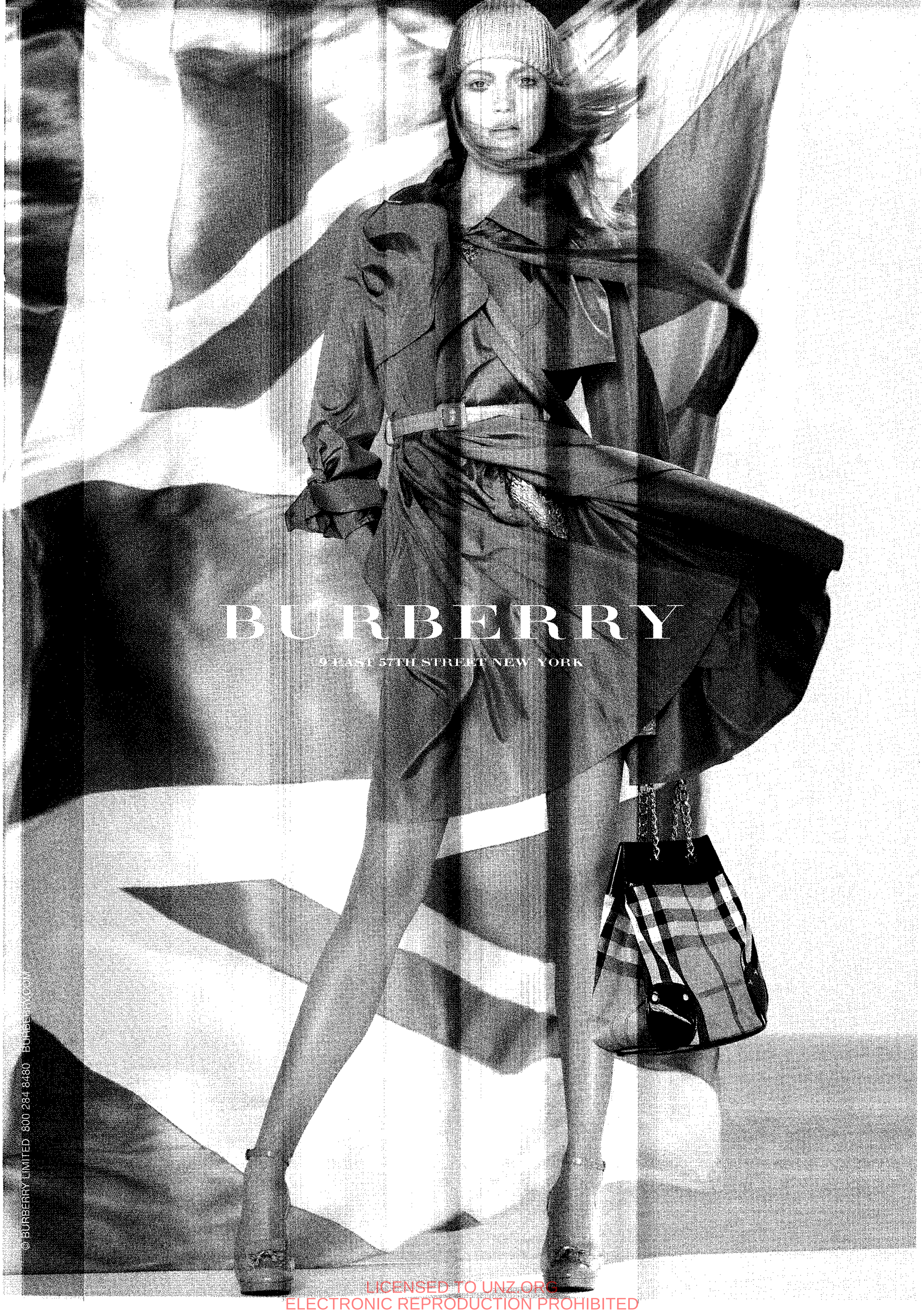
Nick Paumgarten ("Pretty Things," p. 124) is a staff writer.

Michael Roberts (Sketchbook, p. 137) is the magazine's fashion editor. His book "M.R.," which includes a collection of his *New Yorker* cover art, was published last year.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 144) writes about books and dance for the magazine. ♦



"Same old, same old, Rapunzel."



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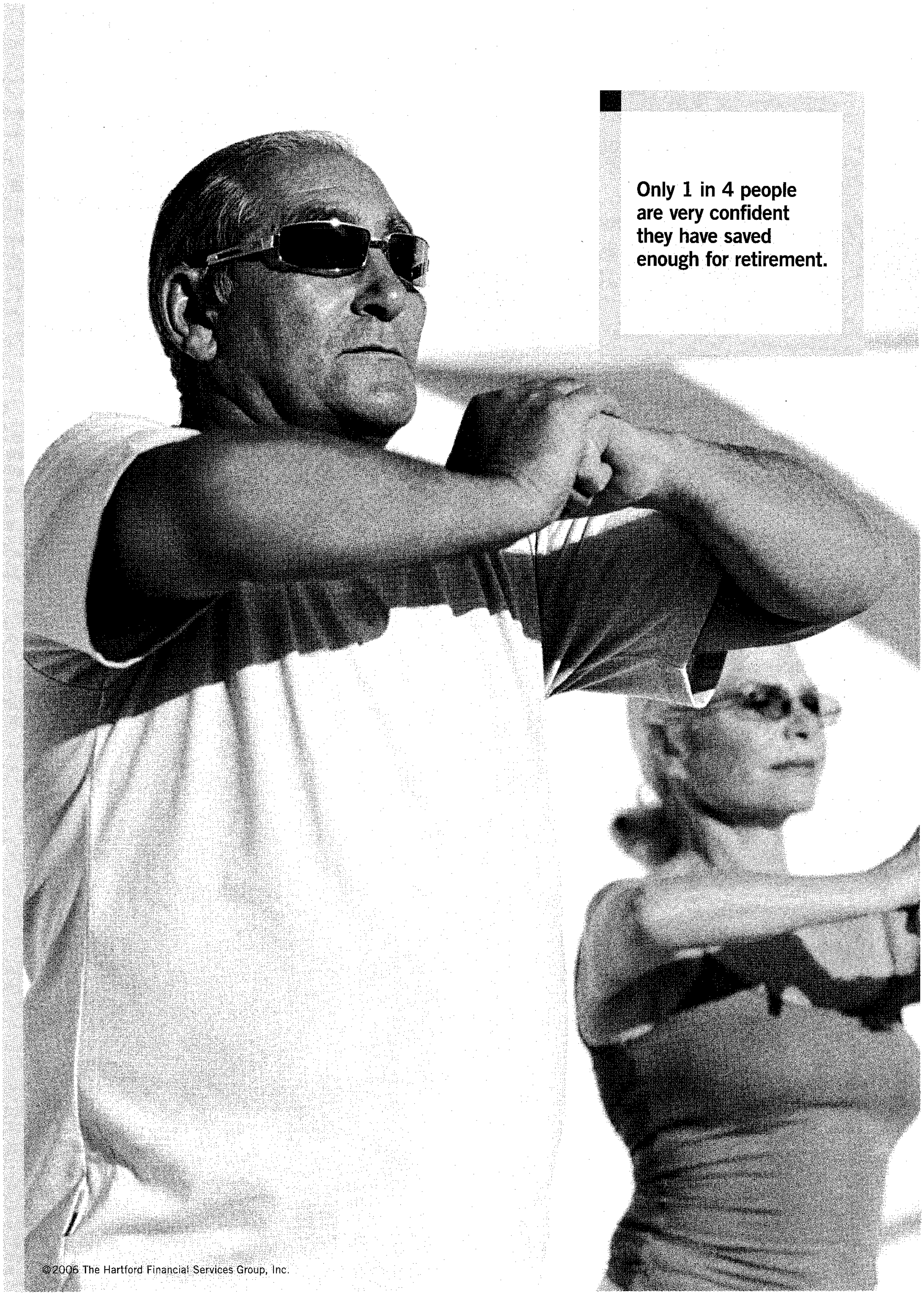
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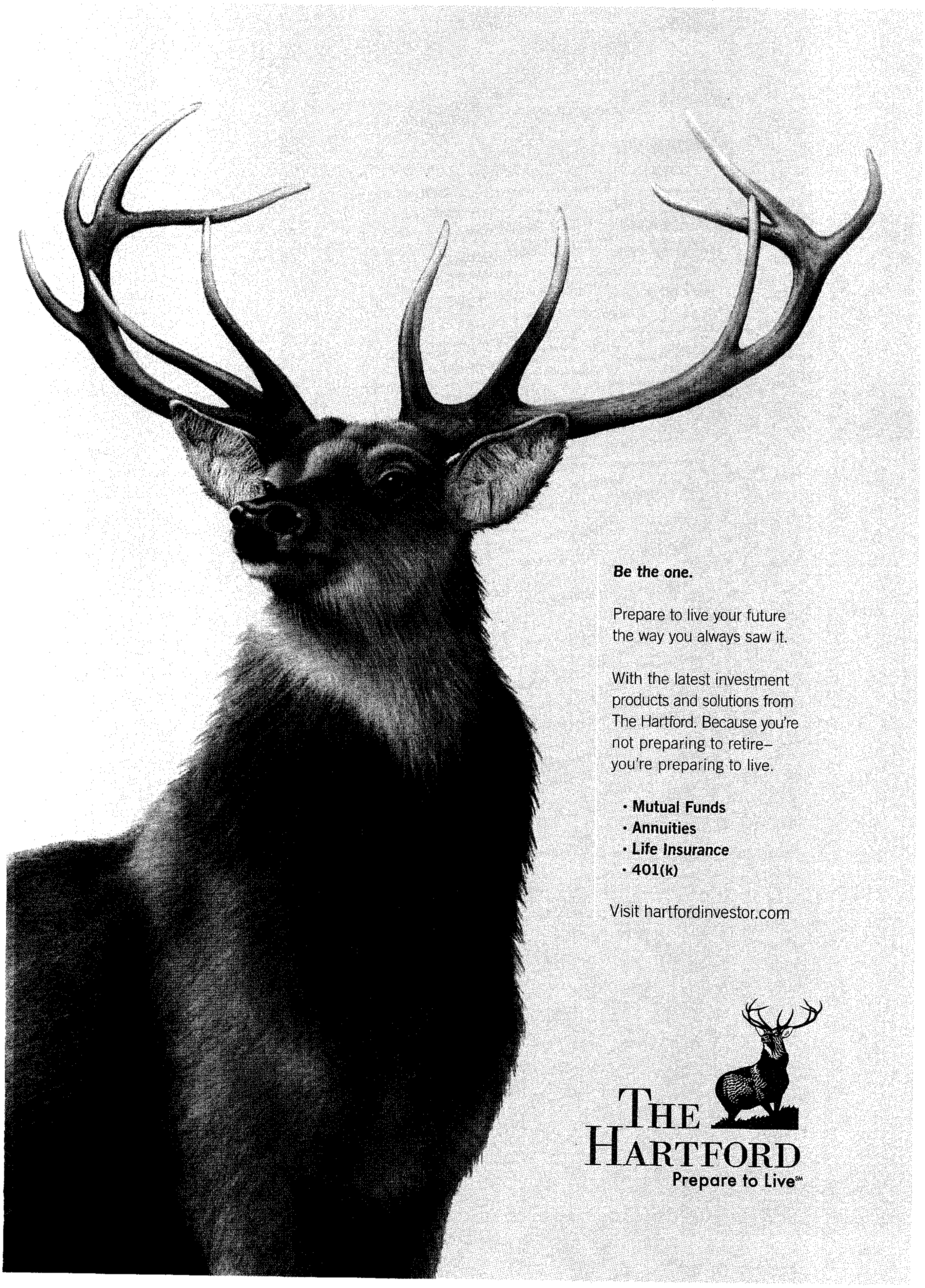

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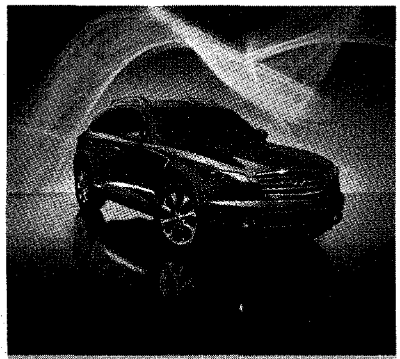

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HOW TO BE HAPPY

John Lanchester describes positive psychology as telling us "things that people have known for a long time, except with scientific footnotes" (Books, February 27th). Perhaps Lanchester already "knew" these things, but it wasn't until recently that science proved that, among other things, optimistic people are much less likely to die of heart attacks than pessimists, controlling for all known physical risk factors, and that women who display genuine (Duchenne) smiles to a photographer at age twenty-one go on to have fewer divorces and more marital satisfaction than those who display fake smiles. Positive psychology has also shown that engagement and the pursuit of meaning are much more predictive of life satisfaction than the pursuit of pleasure, and that externalities (e.g., weather, money, health, marriage, religion) together account for no more than eighteen per cent of the variance in life satisfaction. "Well, I'll be darned" is probably more accurate than Lanchester's "Well, duh."

Martin E. P. Seligman
Professor of Psychology
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.

Lanchester accepts Darrin McMahon's contention that the Founding Fathers meant something rather dark by the phrase "the pursuit of happiness," citing Samuel Johnson's definition of "pursuit" as "the act of following with hostile intention." Of course, this is correct when used in the context of pursuing a foe (Johnson's illustration), but Johnson gives three times the space and attention (including quotations citing the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of satisfactions) to another meaning of "pursuit," one that the drafters of the Declaration clearly intended: the "endeavour to attain."

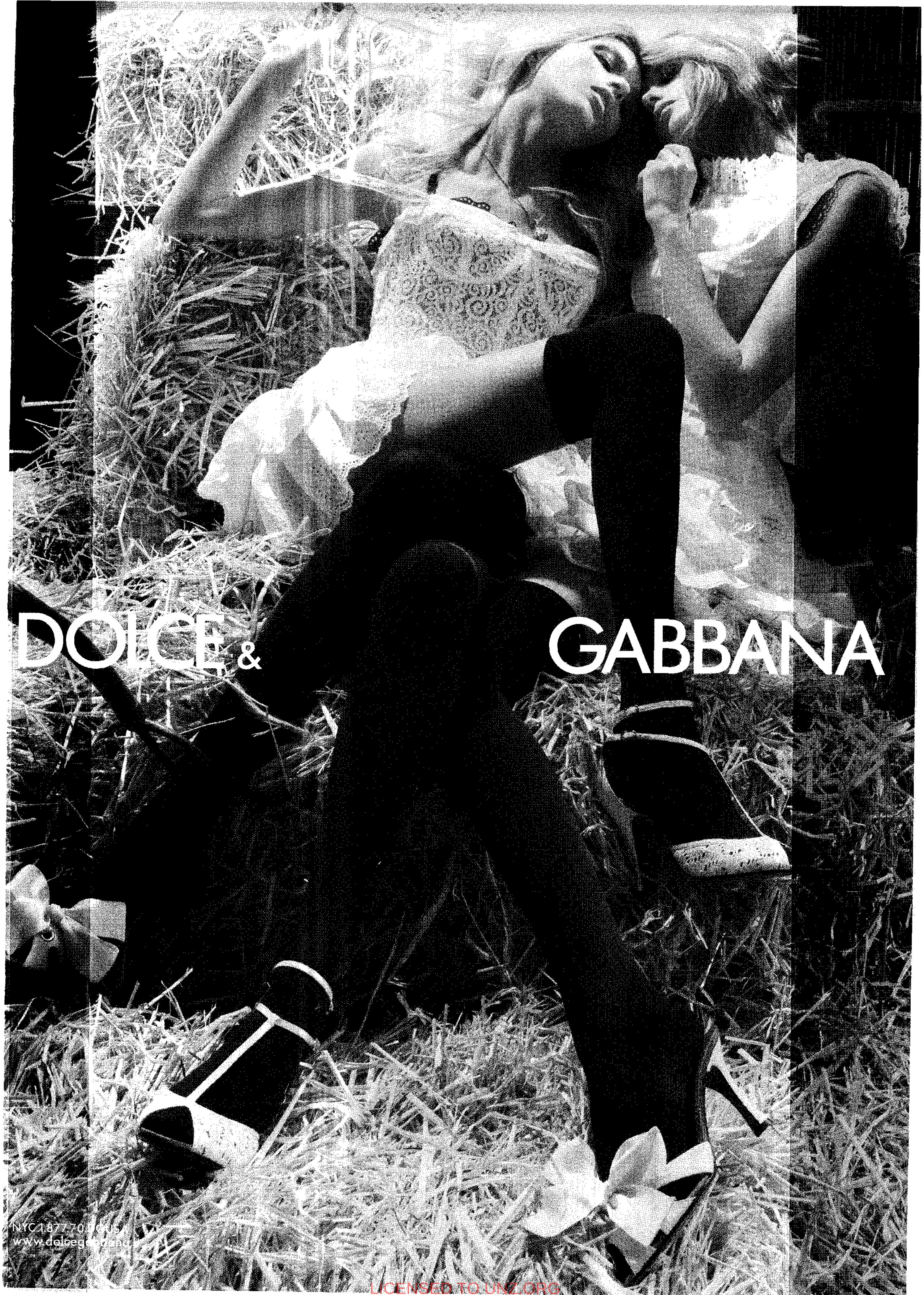
Glynn Baugher
Professor Emeritus of English
Frostburg State University
LaVale, Md.

Lanchester, in his piece on the pursuit of happiness, refers to a "happiness formula," which I developed along with Ken Sheldon and David Schkade. In this "formula"—a reductive term that we never used—three primary factors determine happiness: your genetically based "set point," the circumstances of your life, and the intentional activities or behaviors you engage in. Lanchester follows the lead of Jon Haidt (in "The Happiness Hypothesis") and Martin Seligman (in "Authentic Happiness") in using the term "voluntary" for the third factor. Beyond the interpretation of "voluntary" that Lanchester focusses on (and dismisses as obvious)—that of nurturing relationships—we also looked at a more nuanced range of intentional behaviors, including expressing gratitude, practicing optimism, and committing to lifelong goals.

Sonja Lyubomirsky
Professor of Psychology
University of California
Riverside, Calif.

NUCLEAR POLITICS

Steve Coll appears to admit that countries deemed "illegitimate" possessors of nuclear weapons by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (such as India and Pakistan) may be pointing the way to a balance-of-power scheme for the twenty-first century ("The Stand-Off," February 13th & 20th). It may be time for the rest of the world to see that this is likely to work. There can be no peaceful solution in the Middle East if one state is quietly permitted to arm itself with nuclear weapons while others in the region are prohibited from having either nuclear or conventional weapons. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States successfully warded off direct attacks by making clear that any strike with conventional weapons could precipitate nuclear disaster. The "legitimate" nuclear countries (the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, China) should consider arranging regional systems of "mutual deterrence,"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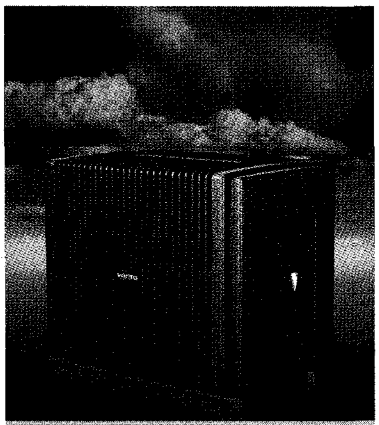

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in recognition that open possession of nuclear arms among enemies can be a useful measure to prevent war.
Frederick Thayer
Professor Emeritus of Public and International Affairs
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Coll's description of how close India and Pakistan came to war in early 2002 is a chilling reminder of the volatility and distrust that still characterize relations between those two countries. One would think that U.S. policy toward both countries would strive to tamp down the nuclear arms race in which they are currently engaged. Unfortunately, the U.S. and India have announced an agreement whose implementation requires exempting India from critical provisions of some international nonproliferation accords and domestic export-control laws. The restoration of India's ability to buy nuclear fuel for its civilian reactors, in the absence of any countervailing restrictions on India's weapons production, will allow India to allocate its entire indigenous uranium supply to weapons-making. Pakistan, which asked for a similar deal from the U.S. but was refused, will likely turn to China, India's chief regional rival, for assistance, thus accelerating the nuclear arms race in South Asia.
Leonard Weiss
Silver Spring, Md.

TORTURE AND THE U.S.

Jane Mayer deserves much appreciation for highlighting the principled—though sadly thwarted—role of Alberto J. Mora in opposing the Bush Administration's treatment of detainees ("The Memo," February 27th). Once again, she has shown that opposition to torture does not pit conservative against liberal. Rather, it is a choice between lawlessness and the rule of law. Here, at the Program for Torture Victims, the oldest program in the U.S. treating survivors' immediate and long-term health consequences, we see hundreds of people from around the world who remain devastated by the sorts of abuse that, Mayer reports, at least some in the Pentagon are still calling "within the bounds." It is profoundly disturbing not to hear an unequivocal rejection from our Administration of this unholy activity.
Michael Nutkiewicz
Executive Director, Program for Torture Victims
Los Angeles, Calif.

MAKING WORDS MATTER

In Jeffrey Goldberg's article on Michael Gerson, President Bush's one-time chief speechwriter and current senior policy adviser, Gerson is quoted as saying, "In times of national grief, the words really do matter. And, in times of focussing national purpose, the words really do matter" ("The Believer," February 13th & 20th). While we all can agree on the importance of well-chosen words to convey leadership, words without appropriate action are meaningless. If many in this country are fed up with the President and his Administration, it is because calling oneself "compassionate" as proof that one will fight racism, poverty, and environmental degradation and promote good schools, affordable health care, and fair taxes is mere manipulation when one's policies don't promote these goals, and, in fact, often work in opposition to them. Gerson is correct that words do matter, but deeds matter more.
Craig Storper
Pacific Palisades, Calif.

Gerson was apparently amused that no one at the New York *Times* "seemed to know" that he was using a portion of the Sermon on the Mount in one of President Bush's speeches, but he seemed to forget or overlook the other admonitions made by Jesus in this sermon: that men be peacemakers and seek righteousness, justice, and mercy. If the parishioners of the Falls Church were being bombed, shelled, and tortured like the residents of Iraq, perhaps Gerson could remember the entire sermon.
Barry Hubbard
Atlanta, Ga.

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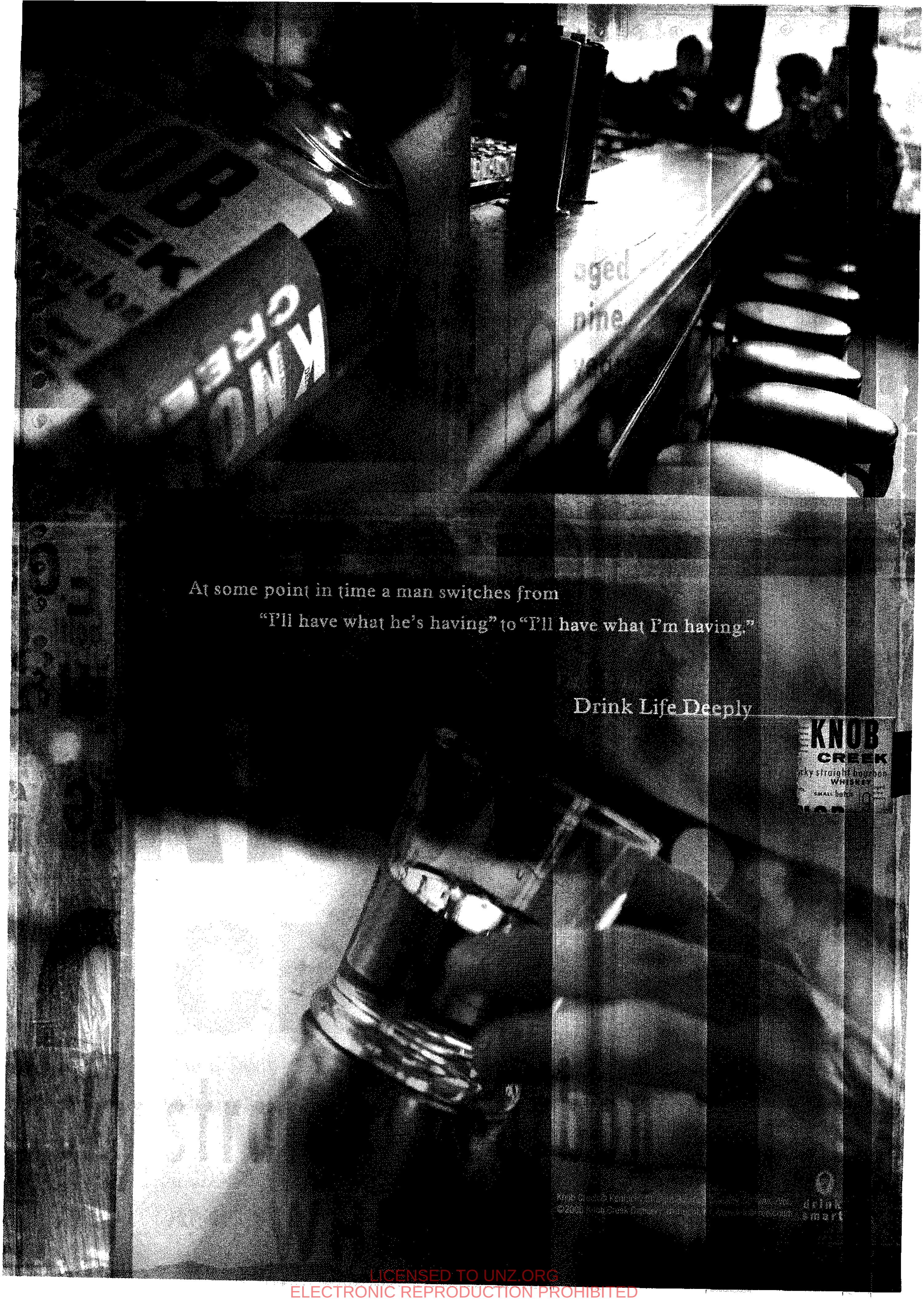
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The Cagle family, in the New York City subway. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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19	20	21	15	16	17	18

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
IT'S A LIVING

Paul Weitz, the co-director of such popular films as "American Pie" and "About a Boy," is also a playwright. His new play, "Show People," is a dark comedy centered on two unemployed Broadway actors who take a peculiar job with a wealthy young banker. The play begins previews at Second Stage this week. The Tony winner Debra Monk ("Steel Pier," "Picnic") and Lawrence Pressman star as the actors; Ty Burrell is the banker. (See page 26.)

NIGHT LIFE
ALL GROWN UP

Jenny Lewis, the lead singer of the Los Angeles-based indie-pop outfit Rilo Kiley, has a new solo album of alt-country-tinged songs titled "Rabbit Fur Coat." A former child actor who has grown into an assured storyteller, Lewis has enlisted the help of the singers (and twin sisters) Chandra and Leigh Watson, who lend her tracks a sepia tint with their timeless harmonizing. Lewis and the Watson twins will perform material from the new record during a two-night stand at Irving Plaza. (See page 30.)

ART
EYE CANDY

"Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Early Impressions," at El Museo del Barrio, pairs work made by the Cuban-born conceptualist in the seventies as an art student in Puerto Rico with the more mature pieces that came later. (See page 36.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
STRAVINSKY DAY

The greatest composer of the last century is fêted with a marathon event at Symphony Space that will include concerts, films, and theatre ("The Soldier's Tale"). (See page 46.)

MOVIES
23 SKIDDOO

Before sound films put an end to vaudeville, Warner Bros. made almost two thousand short films between 1926 and 1937 featuring the greatest acts of the era, including Eddie Cantor, the Nicholas Brothers, and Burns and Allen. The Donnell Library Center is spearheading the preservation and restoration of these films, which are being screened and are also available for private viewing. (See page 54.)

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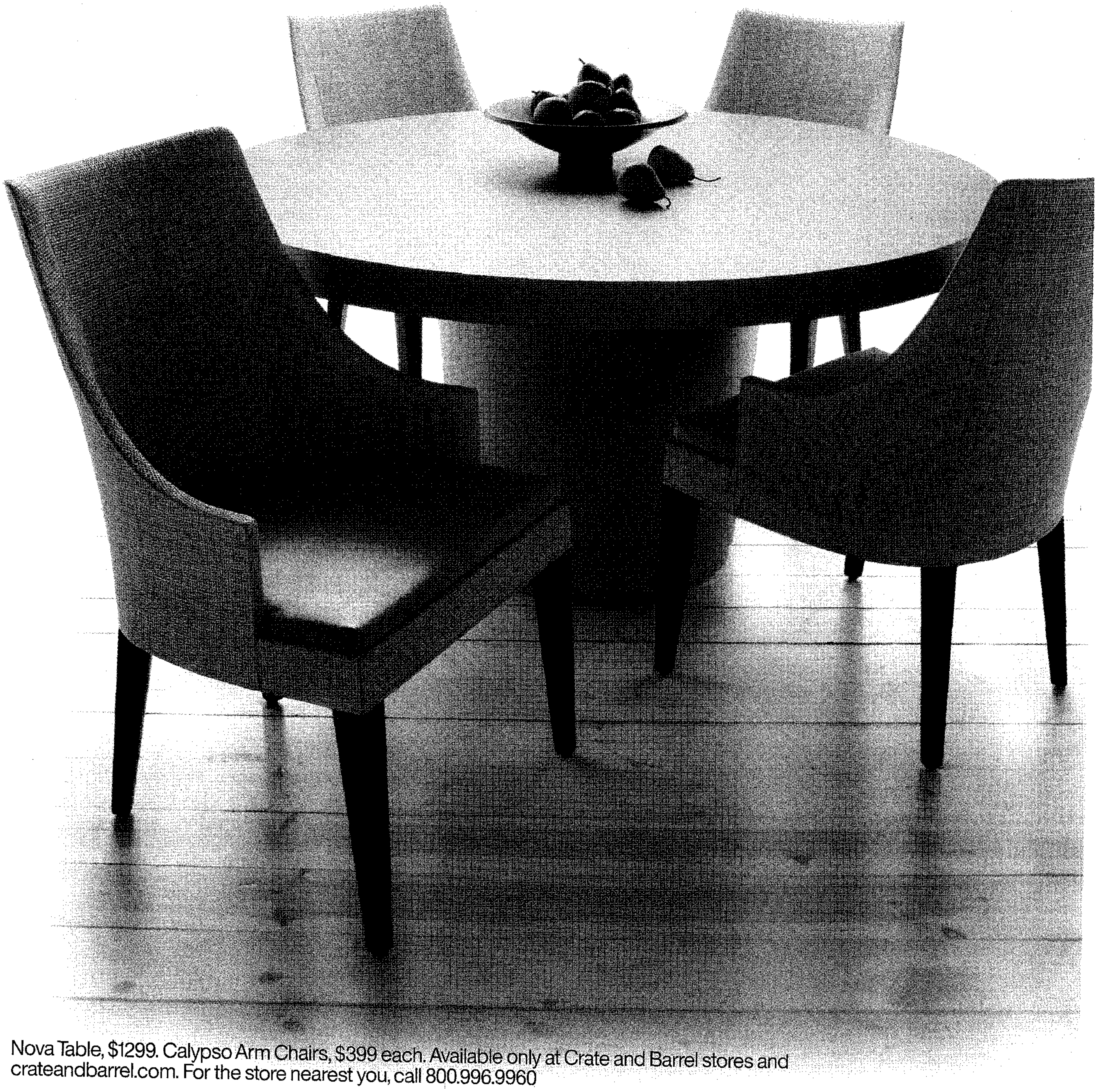

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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CYCLONE
Michael Imperioli's Studio Dante presents the world première of a dark comedy by Ron Fitzgerald, about a young man searching for meaning in New Jersey after his father dies. Previews begin March 15. Opens March 18. (257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE
Alec Baldwin stars in a revival of Joe Orton's play, in which a saucy landlady and her brother fall for the same man. In previews. Opens March 16. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

FAHRENHEIT 451
Ray Bradbury's play based on his sci-fi classic. Previews begin March 16. Opens March 21. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FREAK WINDS
The U.S. première of an Australian psychological thriller about a young insurance salesman forced to take shelter in a stranger's home during a horrible storm. Written and directed by Marshall Napier. Previews begin March 17. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-352-3101.)

FULL BLOOM
Vital Theatre Company presents Suzanne Bradbeer's drama, about a teenage Manhattan girl grappling with her self-image in a culture that esteems beauty. In previews. Opens March 14. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-352-3101.)

JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS
Gordon Greenberg directs this revival of the 1968 musical celebrating the poetic Belgian composer. In previews. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

JUNTA HIGH
A new absurdist show written by Clay MacLeod Chapman imagines an American high school for terrorists, complete with evil cheerleaders and homicidal quarterbacks. Opens March 16. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

LIVING ROOM IN AFRICA
Edge Theatre Company presents Bathsheba Doran's drama, about a pair of Brits who move to Africa to open an art museum but are soon faced with the devastation of poverty and disease. In previews. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MERCY ON THE DOORSTEP
The New York première of Gip Hoppe's dark comedy about hope and redemption. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

NOT CLOWN
A new play by Steve Moore imagines a world in which circuses have been banned and clowns are tortured. Previews begin March 16. Opens March 18. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

OTHELLO
The Inner Circle Theatre Company presents Shakespeare's epic story of love and jealousy. Previews begin March 17. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 866-811-4111.)

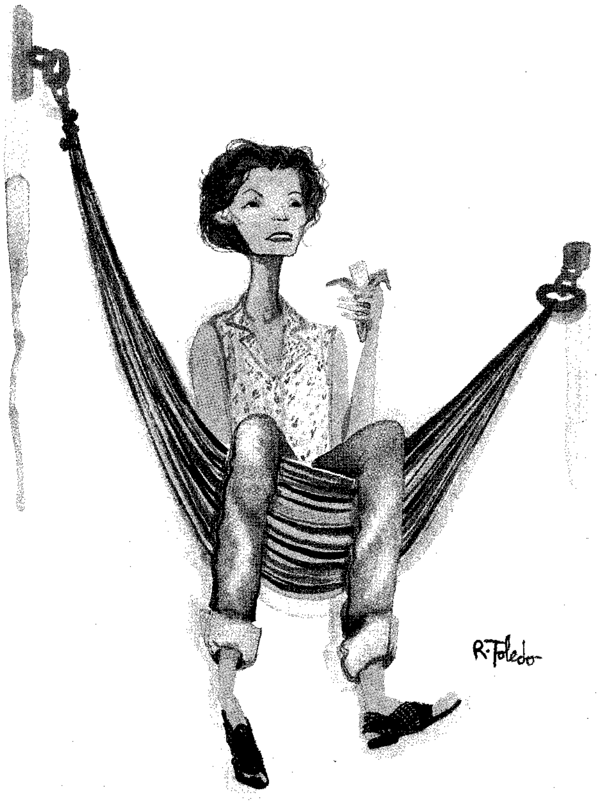
POINTS OF DEPARTURE
The Intar season continues with a thriller by Michael John Garcés, about a Central American man returning to his home country after having assimilated in the U.S. In previews. Opens March 19. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS GARLAND
Adrienne Barbeau stars as Judy Garland in Billy Van Zandt's play, which depicts the chanteuse backstage before her final concert appearance. In previews. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

A SAFE HARBOR FOR ELIZABETH BISHOP
A new play by Marta Góes, about the poet's twenty-year romance with the Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares, with Amy Irving in the title role. Previews begin March 21. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL
A musical based on the Newbery Medal-winning book by Patricia MacLachlan, about a woman who enters a family's lonely life on the prairie. Previews begin March 19. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SHILOH RULES
The New York première of a satire about Civil War reënactment, written by Doris Baizley and directed by Michaela Goldhaber. Previews begin March 18. (Gene Frankel, 24 Bond St. 212-868-4444.)



Amy Irving stars in "A Safe Harbor for Elizabeth Bishop."

SHOW PEOPLE
A new play by Paul Weitz, about two Broadway actors who haven't acted in years. Directed by Peter Askin. Previews begin March 16. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

SIDD
A new musical inspired by "Siddhartha," the Hermann Hesse classic about a man's wanderings toward enlightenment. Opens March 15. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

TRIAL BY WATER
Qui Nguyen's play about two Vietnamese brothers who escape their home to seek a better life. In previews. (45 Below, 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

TRYST
In Karoline Leach's romantic thriller, set in Edwardian England, a con man focusses his attentions on a shopgirl. Previews begin March 21. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

WALK THE MOUNTAIN
Jude Narita's one-woman show is based on her conversations with Vietnamese and Cambodian women. Previews begin March 15. Opens March 19. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

WELL
Lisa Kron's comedy, which makes its Broadway début after a successful run at the Public in 2004, explores the conventional wisdom of wellness. Leigh Silverman directs. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

BACK OF THE THROAT
In Yussef El Guindi's brilliant and sinewy new play, two government agents search through the belongings of the incredulous Khaled (the convincing Adeel Akhtar), a struggling writer who could be an Arab-American version of the young Woody Allen. At first, the agents are all daft politeness, but the mock bonhomie soon gives way to a web of allegations. Khaled's resistance is that of a sane man caught up in Orwellian madness, a sense that's heightened by the effective work of the director, Jim Simpson. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

BERNARDA ALBA
Despite the weak, practically nonexistent book and the troublingly wispy score by Michael John LaChiusa, director Graciela Daniele manages to pull off a few surprises in this musical adaptation of the poet Federico García Lorca's last play: her staging is clear and dramatic; her choreography more than serviceable. But Phylicia Rashad, as Bernarda Alba, the controlling matriarch of five very different daughters, is a disappointment. Her strange, clenched-mouth accent veers between her idea of what Spanish sounds like in translation and a black syntax best left to "The Cosby Show." The ever astonishing singer and actress Daphne Rubin-Vega is criminally underused. Dreadfully miscast as Bernarda's bitter, crippled daughter, Rubin-Vega is denied what she does best: projecting sunshine through her tears. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

BRIDGE & TUNNEL
Sarah Jones—tall, polyethnic, and protean—assumes fourteen personas, including a Vietnamese-American slam poet and a neurotic, punning Pakistani-born m.c. She opens as the hunched crone Miss Lady, of the Homeless Ushers in the Theatres of New York program. "Don't feel sorry for me because I am homeless," she says. "Feel sorry for me because I have now seen 'Beauty and the Beast' over four hundred times." The audience laughs, but Jones's can't-we-all-just-get-along message plays as well with the Belle-and-Beast set as it does with the downtown fans who liked her enough at the Nuyorican Poets Café and the Culture Project to risk the journey north. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEFIANCE
John Patrick Shanley's schematic follow-up to the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Doubt" is a lecture on moral courage disguised as a play. On a Southern Marine base in 1971, a vainglorious commander who wants "one shining, clean achievement" before he retires resolves to handle incidents of racial insubordination by promoting an apolitical African-American as his executive officer. However, while trying to tackle racism in off-base housing, the commander has an affair with the wife of a recruit, which is conduct unbecoming and means the end of his career. The chaplain passes the buck to the executive officer. The executive officer won't brush it under the table. The result: an arid, theatrically inert exercise in bogus eloquence. (Manhattan Theatre Club at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE EMPEROR JONES
The Wooster Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's play, about a Pullman porter (Kate Valk) who lands in jail, escapes to a Caribbean island, and tricks the people there into naming him their emperor. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

FAMILY SECRETS
Bob Balaban directs this one-woman show written and performed by Sherry Glaser, about a Jewish family from the Bronx that has relocated to California. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

RUBEN TOLEDO

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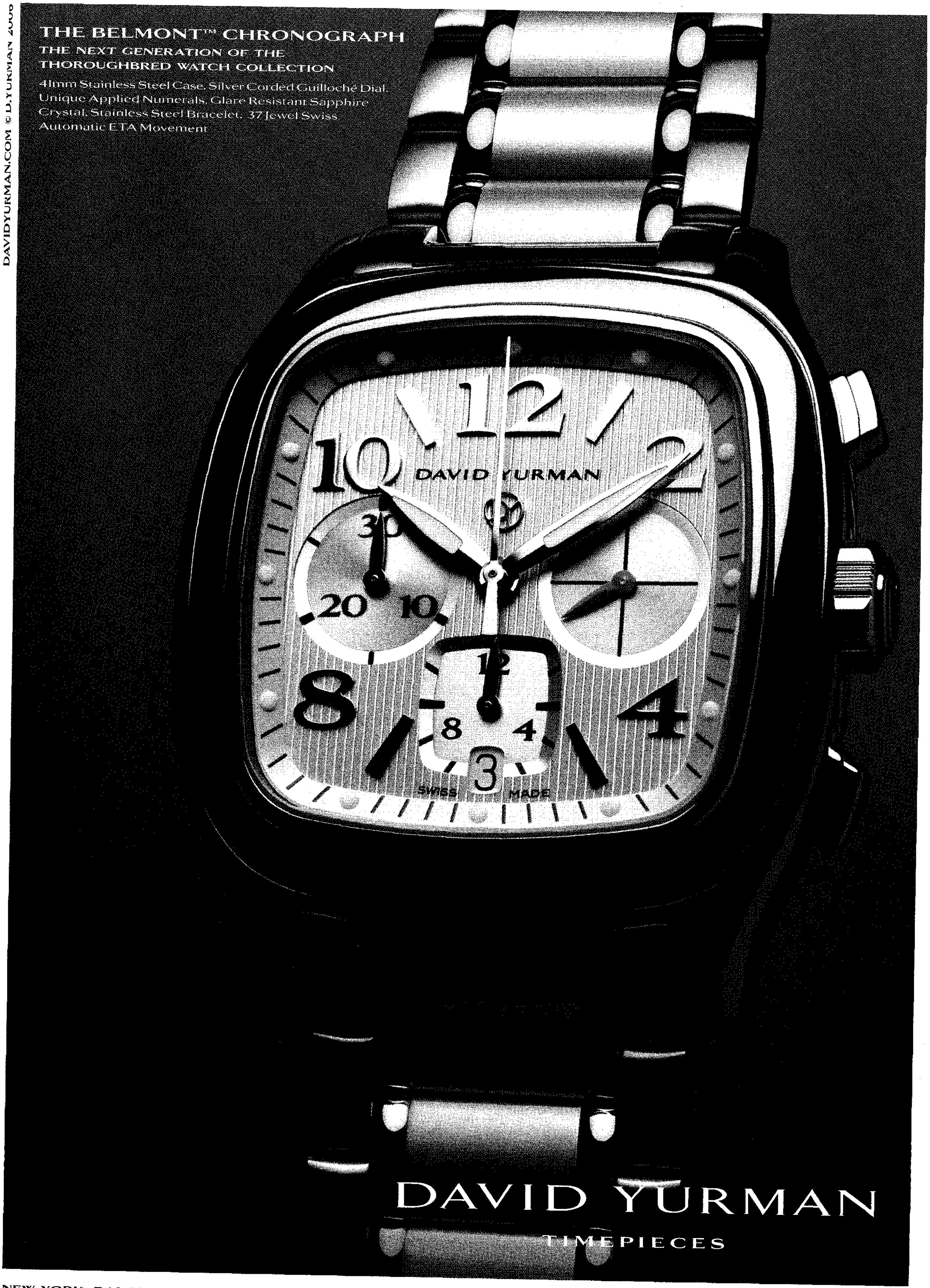
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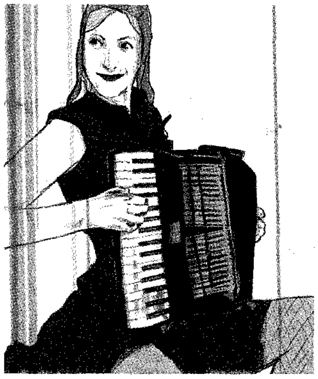
TIMEPIECES

NEW YORK BAL HARBOUR ATLANTA DALLAS HOUSTON LAS VEGAS SOUTH COAST PLAZA

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SWEET AND HIGH

Several weeks ago, a couple in their fifties were sitting in the Anyway Café, a tiny, dark Russian bistro on East Second Street that serves flavored vodkas and excellent wild-mushroom *ikra.* The man wore a sports jacket, a bow tie, and a wide smile. His companion was leaning in close and speaking German into his ear. Near them, sitting on a stool, a woman in a black vinyl dress and a clear plastic shower cap was playing an accordion with a small light attached to it. In a pure, high voice, she sang Serge Gainsbourg's "Quoi" and Keren Ann's "Jardin d'Hiver," both in French. The singer is the self-described "neo soprano" Nicole Renaud, whose voice earns the overused descriptor "ethereal." After exchanging a few words with the couple, she sang "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen," from "The Magic Flute," and then "Der Holle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen." It was the kind of serendipitous moment one hopes to have in a New York café but rarely does. Renaud plays Mondays at Chibi's Bar, on Mott Street, and every other Wednesday night at Anyway Café.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*



RACHEL DOMM

GEORGE M. COHAN TONIGHT!
Jon Peterson stars in this musical about the prolific Broadway legend. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

GREY GARDENS
Based on the Maysles brothers' classic 1975 documentary about two very individualistic hermits, Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, who also happened to be the aunt and cousin of the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, this musical manages to destroy most of the real-life magic that the ladies conveyed from their cat-infested, memory-clogged home in East Hampton, "a mean, nasty Republican town," as Little Edie described it in the film. Christine Ebersole stars as the elder Beale in the show's first half, in better days, and as her daughter in the second half—and she delivers, particularly when she's in full Little Edie mode. Not only does she resemble the charismatic eccentric; she inhabits her distinctive speech patterns as though they were her own. But the first act's flash and silly plot turns overwhelm the chamber-music atmosphere of the second act, which offers little interesting music; only Ebersole manages to bring real poetry to the enterprise. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HEDDA GABLER
Cate Blanchett and Hugo Weaving star in a Sydney Theatre Company production of Ibsen's classic play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

INDOOR/OUTDOOR
With her beguiling warble, Emily Cass McDonnell portrays Samantha, a runty kitten cast out by her owners, as an angst-ridden innocent desperate to be at first noticed, then loved, and, finally, understood. Rife with upbeat eighties music and set amid a Crayola kaleidoscope of carpet, Kenny Finkle's energetic little comedy, cunningly directed by Daniel Goldstein, goes deeper than its initial feel-good sheen suggests. The humanization of the felines, including a naïve-tough-guy alley cat named Oscar (performed with preternatural vitality by Mario Campanaro), not only provides a model for human kindness but also plays directly to the suspicions of cat owners—that cats have feelings, too. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 19.)

THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE
The louts and lunatics who inhabit Martin McDonagh's black comedy (which is having its American première at the Atlantic Theatre Company, under the firm-handed direction of Wilson Milam) are gruesome and unforgettable figures. McDonagh sets his ghoulish satire in 1993, during the Troubles, in an Aran Island cottage, where Wee Thomas, the cat of the infamous terrorist Padraic (David Wilmot), is found murdered. While Padraic is on his way home to nurse the animal, we learn that Wee Thomas was actually whacked as political payback by the local I.N.L.A.—three thugs with Northern Irish accents, who took issue with Padraic's having tortured a drug dealer whose kickbacks were subsidizing their mayhem. The absurd bloodfest that follows signals the play's psychotic climate, as McDonagh bravely pushes ugliness to the extreme. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/13/06.) (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

MEASURE FOR MEASURE
The Pearl presents Shakespeare's dark comedy, directed by Beatrice Terry. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

MEASURE FOR PLEASURE
David Grimm's new comedy is cobbled together from many influences, ranging from Restoration comedy to campy sex farce. The director, Peter DuBois, has a likable cast at his disposal, particularly Euan Morton, as Molly, a cross-dressing whore who becomes a ladies' maid to the despised Lady Vanity Lustforth (Suzanne Bertish), thus becoming embroiled in a battle for the heart and head of Captain Dick Dashwood (Saxon Palmer). Eventually, Molly meets up with the lovely Hermione Goode (Emily Swallow) and pulls off her curly red wig to devise a trap for straying husbands and heels. The material is uneven, veering between parody, homage, and vulgarity, but the cast—led by Morton—has great energy and sweetness and makes the most of every opportunity for levity. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

THE MUSIC TEACHER
The New Group presents a new play by Wallace Shawn, about a young teacher who creates an opera with his protégée. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

THE PAJAMA GAME
The Roundabout's revival of Adler and Ross's 1954 musical (deftly directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall, at the American Airlines) outshines the original in both its production values and its male lead, Harry Connick, Jr., who is making his Broadway début. He has the confidence of talent—and the sex appeal that comes with it. Here, when boy meets girl there is credible chemistry, and his voice is particularly well suited to the clever score. Connick and the excellent Kelli O'Hara, who, as Babe, has an ingénue's sweet face and a svelte body that tells a different story, make sparks fly off the lusty paean to love, and the show's fizz and flow never falter. (3/6/06) (227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

PHENOMENON
Nerve Ensemble's dance-theatre piece depicts life at the foot of Mt. St. Helens in 1980, on the day before it erupted. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444.)

RABBIT HOLE
Stuck together in a handsome Larchmont house that spins around onstage, Becca (Cynthia Nixon, in a brittle performance) and Howie (the fine John Slattery), whose four-year-old son died in a car accident, are deeply uncomfortable with their shared memories and divergent ways of mourning. Skillfully directed by Daniel Sullivan, "Rabbit Hole" insinuates that we are always aliens within our own lives, awaiting the disaster that will crack open the pretense of our intimacies. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

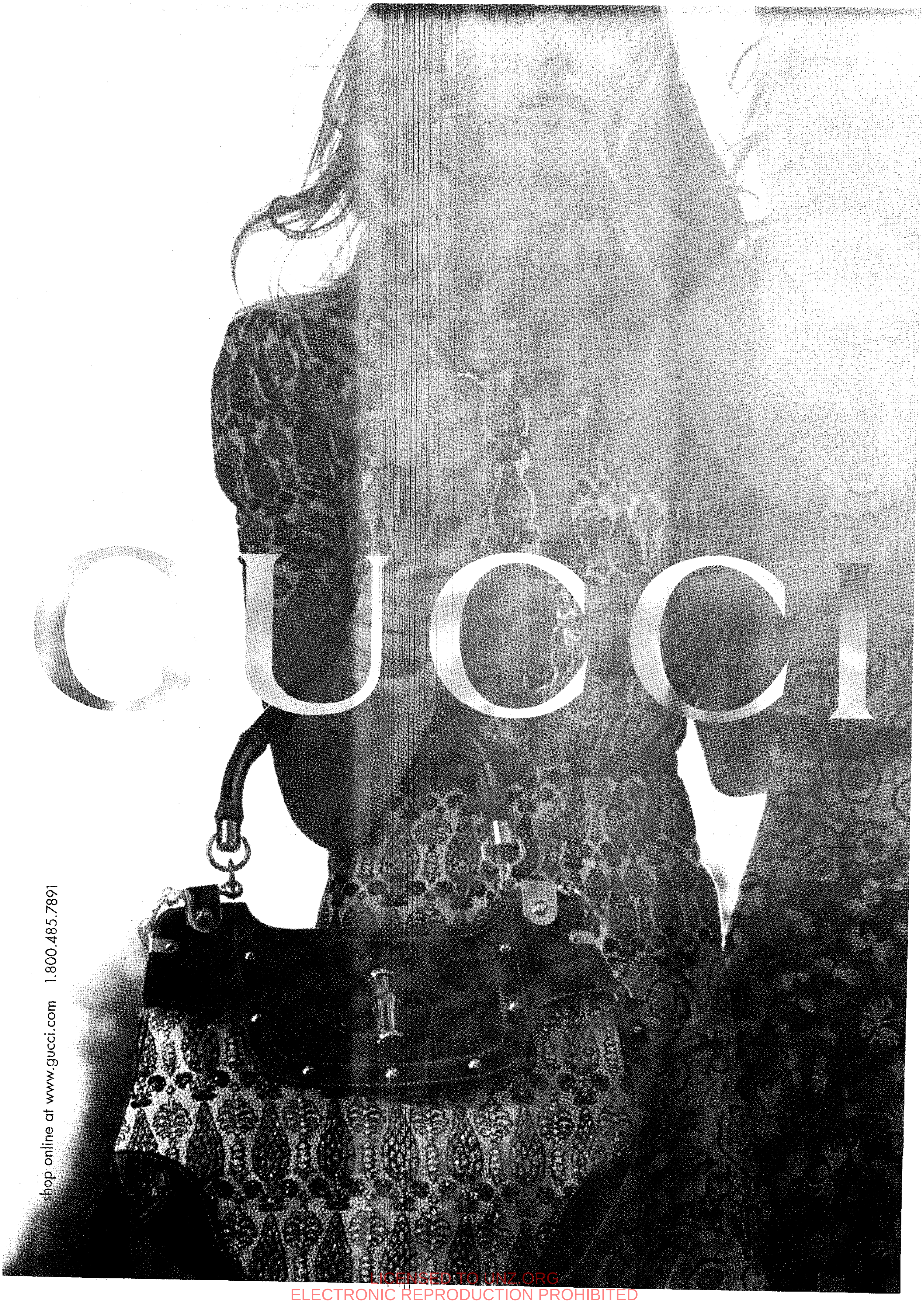
RED LIGHT WINTER
The sensational charmer Davis (played with wicked bravado by Gary Wilmes), who is the hypotenuse of the complex and compelling love triangle in Adam Rapp's new play (a Steppenwolf production at the Barrow Street), feeds off the deadness in others. His former college roommate, a bearded, insecure playwright named Matt (the superb, edgy Christopher Denham), offers Davis an emptiness that he can fill. The doe-eyed Christina (Lisa Joyce, making an effective New York début), a soi-disant French singer who turns out to be a "window whore" whom Davis picked up in Amsterdam's red-light district, exudes a sense of lostness in her pliancy. Rapp, who also directed, stages as cleverly as he writes; "Red Light Winter" is a demonstration of psychological imperialism that is at once thrilling and killing. (2/27/06) (27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

RING OF FIRE, THE JOHNNY CASH MUSICAL SHOW
The stories of the songs of Johnny Cash are portrayed in a new musical directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SAKE WITH THE HAIKU GEISHA
Randall David Cook's play employs Noh theatre to thread together five related stories. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 212-868-4444.)

SAVAGES
Chris Jorie directs this play by Anne Nelson ("The Guys"), about war and its consequences. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SOLDIER'S WIFE
This revival makes a good case for revisiting this quick-witted work by Rose Franken, an examination of a middle-class marriage reeling from the pressures of wartime and newfound celebrity. The play's heroine, Kate (Angela Pierce), wrote dozens of love letters to her husband, John (Michael Polak), while he was serving abroad. Upon his return home, John has a surprise for Kate: her intimate missives are to be published in book form. The volume's instant success turns Kate into a celebrity purveyor of womanly devotion, threatening her marriage, which is its truest expression. Under Eleanor Reissa's direction, this astutely sentimental period piece deserves its second life. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)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SWEENEY TODD

Under the bold direction and design of John Doyle, this imported British revival, at the Eugene O'Neill, which shrinks the cast of thirty to ten, with actors doubling as musicians, is almost unbearably exciting. With eight chairs, a coffin, and a ladder, Doyle conjures up a universe of woe and wonder; the actors are not just characters and musicians—they are also the scenery. Sweeney (Michael Cerveris), who was transported to Australia for fifteen years on a trumped-up charge by a judge who lusted after his wife, returns to London in disguise to find his wife apparently dead and his beloved daughter (Lauren Molina) the ward of the very judge who sent him away. Cerveris is a terrifying Sweeney, a model of sulfurous restraint. Patti LuPone, as his pragmatic and pathological helpmate, Mrs. Lovett, is a gargoyle of toughness, and positively Weimar. As life and theatre have taught us, there is no escape from the power of the perverse. (11/14/05) (230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]

Three weeks before the application deadline for the 2004 New York Musical Theatre Festival, Jeff Bowen and Hunter Bell dared themselves to write a musical about their rush to come up with a submission. The result is neither a postmodern landmark nor a party-game trifle but a wittily observed X-ray of musical-comedy conventions, acted by a sardonic and immensely likable cast (Susan Blackwell, Heidi Blickenstaff, and the two creators). The jokes are decidedly inside (a working knowledge of the musical "Into the Woods" is essential), but all the shop talk will leave show lovers in stitches. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

TRANSATLANTIC LIAISON

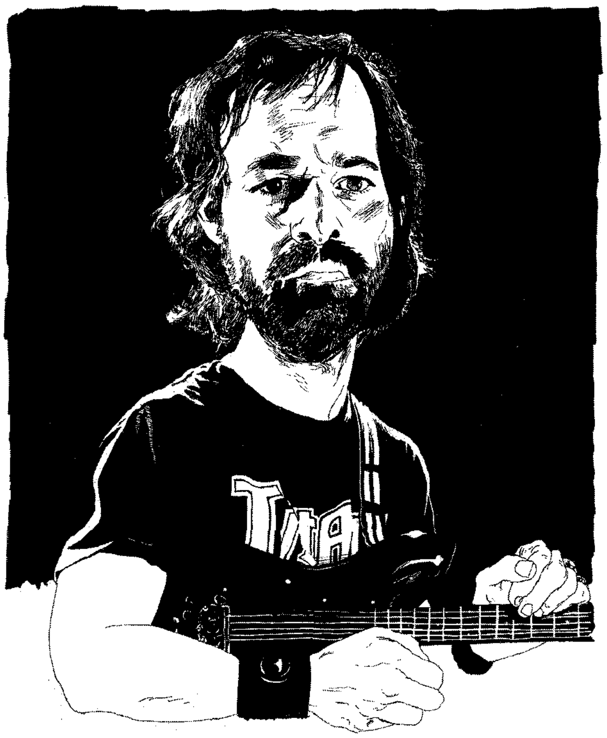
"It's funny that I never think of you as a brainy woman," says the tough-guy Chicago novelist Nelson Algren (nicely underplayed by Matthew S. Tompkins) to his French intellectual lover, Simone de Beauvoir, in Fabrice Rozié's play about their midlife passion—a sentiment that speaks to the central doubt that audiences may share. As Beauvoir, Elizabeth Rothan wears a black slip, speaks in a fruity French accent, and seems redolently artificial—more like an aging Bond girl than the author of "The Second Sex." The structure of the play (loosely based on published letters by Beauvoir to Algren) contributes to the sense of suspended animation, placing both lovers within a cocoon of words. Directed by John McLean. (Harold Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ZOMBOID! (FILM/PERFORMANCE PROJECT #1)

The avant-garde dream-builder Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre make their annual return, but this time around the medium of film has slipped neatly into the meticulous bedlam of Foreman's vision. Hovering over the stage are two large screens projecting tableaux of poker-faced actors in blindfolds. These images stand in oblique opposition to the live performers, who occupy a goth playroom littered with Dadaist toys: plaid cellos, jumbo eyeballs inscribed with Hebrew lettering, and a pair of stuffed donkeys who seem to bear particular symbolic import—periodically they are held prisoner, copulated with, ridden, and revered. The first in a planned multimedia series, "Zomboid!" signals a striking new twist in the director's confounding œuvre. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

Also Playing

ABIGAIL'S PARTY: Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **ALTAR BOYZ:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **I LOVE YOU BECAUSE:** Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE ODD COUPLE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.



David Berman, of the Silver Jews, at Webster Hall.

ANDY FRIEDMAN

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

APT

419 W. 13th St. (212-206-1590)—**Ursula 1000** is the alter ego of a d.j. and multi-instrumentalist named Alex Gimeno. Often described as mild-mannered, he produces dance music that always seems to have one eyebrow raised. It borrows from rock, funk, disco, ska, and Indian sources, and is all the richer for its global approach. On March 17, he turns his regular third-Friday-of-the-month gig into a record-release show for his catchy new album, "Here Comes Tomorrow."

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 16: The veteran soul singer **Bettye LaVette** can deliver a heartbroken wail through a whisper or make a slow ballad pulse like scorching gospel rock. Last year, she released what amounted to a comeback album, "I've Got My Own Hell to Raise," which was produced by Joe Henry (known for, among other things, his work with Solomon Burke). On it, LaVette interprets songs by Joan Armatrading, Sinéad O'Connor, Dolly Parton, and Lucinda Williams. She's here with the leggy, piano-pounding swamp rocker **Marcia Ball.**

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—March 16-18 and March 20-21: Formed in 1969, the **Allman Brothers** band has overcome deaths, drugs, and the waning popularity of Southern rock while managing to remain one of the industry's most profitable live acts. In what has become an annual event, they roll into town for their springtime stand. Through March 26.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 17: The barroom-seasoned baritone **Joe Hurley** leads a fiery rocking band of Hibernians. March 18: A benefit for the Thomas P. Cloherty Family Education Fund. Cloherty, who was born on St. Patrick's Day, was an Eagle Scout as a teenager, and went on to become a special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Stationed in Maine, he dropped dead of a heart attack while running in Acadia National Park in December of last year. He was thirty-seven, and he left behind a wife and four young children. His younger brother is in a local band, **Booga Sugar,** and the party-loving dance rockers are performing in his honor, along with a few friends, including **Vic Thrill + Saturn Missile, Mad Larry, Knockout Drops,** and **Acquiesce.** (For more information, visit www.boogasugar.com.) March 20: The British outfit the **Go! Team** shrewdly mixes early hip-hop, surf rock, and myriad other styles into music that always has fans on the dance floor, shaking their hips. March 21: The **Rakes,** fronted by the spasmodically charismatic Alan Donohoe, put a refreshing spin on the fashionable post-punk sounds of today.

CARNEGIE HALL

57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—March 17: The **Chieftains.** It wouldn't be St. Patrick's Day without a visit from Ireland's musical ambassadors. From their late-fifties work as members of Sean O'Riada's visionary ensemble, Ceoltoiri Chualann, to the years of collaboration with the likes of Van Morrison, James Galway, and Mick Jagger, these instrumental wizards have been doing for traditional Irish music what Bill Monroe did for the rural American string band—treating it with a respect and a dignity that lift it well above any salt-of-the-earth sentimentality.

CODA

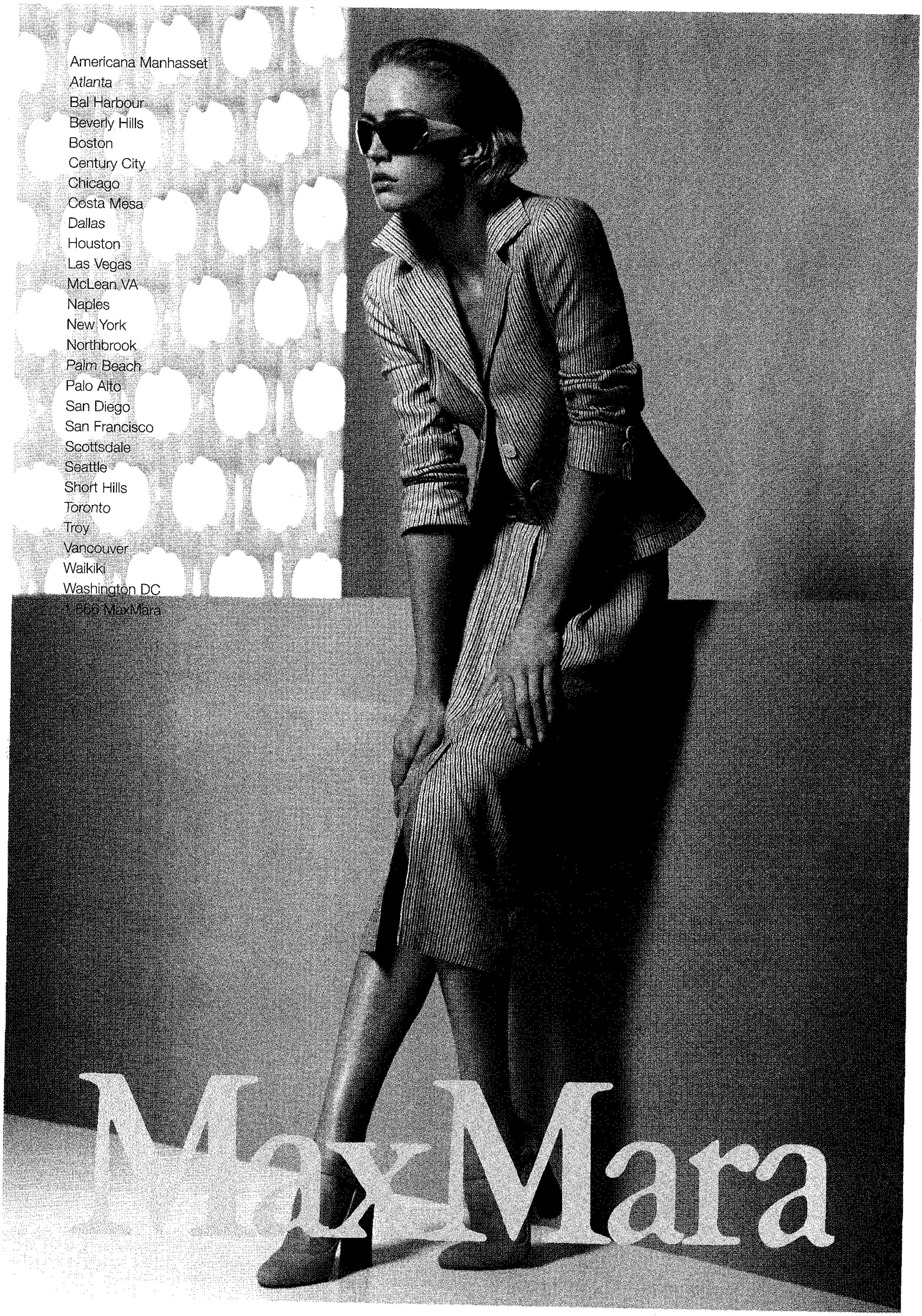
34 E. 34th St. (212-685-3434)—March 17: The Brazilian percussionist **Cyro Baptista** stirs up a storm with his spellbinding ensemble Beat the Donkey.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—March 20: The third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq finds **Michael Stipe, Rufus Wainwright,** and **Bright Eyes** joining the peace activist Cindy Sheehan for a "Bring 'Em Home" concert. With **Fischerspooner, Peaches, Chuck D,** and **Devendra Banhart.**

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 16: **Alpha Blondy** is from the Ivory Coast, and his socially conscious reggae has an African beat. March 18-19: The singer-songwriter **Jenny Lewis** was the cute twelve-year-old redhead who kissed Ben on "Growing Pains" back in 1988, and that first brush with stardom provides the subject of some of the best songs on her new CD, "Rabbit Fur Coat." On the album's title track, she sings in an ethereal little-girl voice about her bitter experience as "a hundred-thousand-dollar kid." One moment, the voice seems about to break into tears, and the next it's cussing and talking about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drinking beer. Lewis uses an actorly control of diction and intonation to fill her gospelly pop songs with personality. She's so good that it's almost a shame—she's going to have to cope with the stardom thing all over again.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 15: **James Hunter,** a blue-eyed-soul singer from Colchester, England, with a chiselled chin and an eager, polite stage manner, returns to a bygone era with moving originals that evoke, variously, Ben E. King, Ray Charles, and James Brown. His latest album, "People Gonna Talk," is the first of his to be released in the U.S. March 21: **Lúnasa** takes its name from an ancient Celtic harvest festival. Featuring the ex-Waterboys bassist Trevor Hutchinson, the group never shies away from the rhythmic roots of traditional Irish music.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 17: The local Irish rockers **Black 47.** March 18: **Method of Defiance,** the latest project of the maverick underground producer and bassist Bill Laswell.

MAKOR

35 W. 67th St. (212-601-1000)—The guitarist and singer **Guy Davis,** the son of the actors and writers Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, has dedicated his life to the rural blues. On March 16, he previews material from his forthcoming album, "Skunkmellow."

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 20: **Annie,** a Norwegian singer with a breathy voice that reaches into the high registers and an airy pop sensibility that reaches back to the synthesized beats of the early eighties. March 21: The **Zutons,** from Liverpool, make it clear that behind the façade of even the hippest indie rocker lurks a jam-band affinity.

MILLER THEATRE

Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. (212-854-7799)—March 21: Central Asia is often in the news these days, but little attention is given to the region's musical heritage. The three acts in this concert might change that. **Tengir-Too,** from Kyrgyzstan, which is led by the multi-instrumentalist Nurlanbek Nyshanov, features a *komuz* (three-string fretless lute) player named Zainidin Imanaliev, famed for his flamboyant performance style. The **Academy of Shashmaqâm,** from Tajikistan, keeps alive Sufi-inspired court music. **Homayun Sakhi** is a noted *rubâb* (short-necked lute) player from Afghanistan who now lives in Fremont, California.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—March 16-19: The **Pogues,** one of the greatest disreputable bands in rock history, ring in St. Patrick's Day. The group's brilliant and dissipated original songwriter and lead singer, Shane MacGowan, who has made an art out of drunkenly winging it, is back in the fold.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—March 17-18: **Celtic Woman,** featuring four young female Irish singers and a fiddler, puts a gloss on traditional Celtic tunes as well as more contemporary fare like Enya's "Orinoco Flow" and the theme from "The Lord of the Rings." The group, which was put together by a "Riverdance" veteran and a few Irish entrepreneurs for a PBS television special a few years ago, has been a smashing success.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—March 15-16: The Los Angeles rappers **Dilated Peoples.** At the start of the decade, the trio (made up of Rakaa, Evidence, and DJ Babu) clawed their way out of the underground with their major-label début, "The Platform." Since then, they've enjoyed the company of Kanye West, who produced their single "This Way," in 2004, but their new album, "20/20," takes them back to their gritty roots.

SOUTHPAW

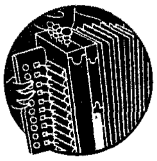
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—March 15: **Isobel Campbell,** a gauze-voiced singer who used to be in Belle and Sebastian, recently released "Ballad of the Broken Seas," a haunting album with Mark Lanegan, the erstwhile Screaming Trees vocalist. The album, which includes covers of "Ramblin' Man" and "St. James Infirmary," as well as meandering originals by Campbell, was a long-distance affair. The two recorded it in separate locations (Scotland and L.A.); for this show, Campbell is appearing with **Eugene Kelly,** formerly of the Edinburgh group the Vaselines, which was a favorite of Kurt Cobain.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—March 15: A night of legendary blues musicians, with the pianist **Pinetop Perkins,** a veteran of Muddy Waters's band; the guitarist **Elvin Bishop,** who used to play with Paul Butterfield; and the Chicago blues-harp player **Carey Bell.** The drummer Yonrico Scott, of the Derek Trucks band, will also be on hand, as will the New York-based pianist **Yosi Piamenta** and his Heavenly Jams Band. March 17-18: The cocktail-ready electronica of **Stereolab.**

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—March 17-18: The **Silver Jews,** the brainchild of the poet and songwriter David Berman, have been playing noisy, inspired, and extremely literate post-punk off and on since 1990. The core band revolves around Berman, Stephen Malkmus, and Bob Nastanovich (both from Pavement), although Malkmus is not touring with the group at present. The three were friends at the University of Virginia. Following school, they moved to the New York metro area, where they took jobs as museum guards at the Whitney (Berman and Malkmus) and as a bus driver (Nastanovich) and stayed up all night writing and jamming to blow off steam. The band is closing in on its second decade, but this is the first time that Berman is going on the road, supporting a superb new album, "Tanglewood Numbers," which is full of sweet harmonies and country-tinged guitar work. One can still hear echoes of that joyful, chaotic freedom from Berman's security-guard days.



POP NOTES
SUBTLE CHARMS

I call it "hotel music." Record stores call it "downtempo." You may have your own term. It is the immensely tasteful, slinky electronic music you hear in boutique hotels, trendy restaurants, gas stations, and select doctors' offices. The music started in England, at some point in the mid-nineteen-eighties, as acid jazz, an undemonstrative blend of jazz and funk. Over time, it absorbed the skipping digital rhythms of jungle and eventually was blanched into an easily digested burble of indeterminate origin that signifies sex, sophistication, and an expensive jet-setting life style—or so credit-card companies hope. There are a bazillion records like this, hoping to simultaneously relax you and make you buy new furniture. (The Hotel Costes compilations, currently up to Volume 8, are a good example of this pro-shopping music.) Shrift's **"Lost in a Moment"** (Six Degrees) fits neatly into this genre, with a distinct difference: it's really good. Shrift turns the innate gentility of the music into actual grace, and the singer Nina Miranda has a voice like a rough cotton washcloth—comforting, but not without some pleasantly unpredictable bumps. "Lost in a Moment" is cast in a vaguely Brazilian color, and nothing ever rises above a vigorous bubble. You will not drop your fork or lose your credit-card receipt when the album is on. But there is a deep sense of physical pleasure to Shrift's music, which is made mostly by Miranda and the British musician Dennis Wheatley. There are brisk moments like "To the Floor," a snippet of seventies disco filtered through several other musical memories, but more typical is "Snow Samba," a slow and diaphanous blend of Brazilian percussion and Miranda's singing in Portuguese, neither element taking the lead; the lyrics, translated, are "You swing, you enchant me, I like to see you at the newspaper stand." Shrift has snuck its smart and subtle record into a genre that is often happy to settle for wallpaper. Don't blame them for blending in.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 15-18: Among the unmistakable traits that **Bobo Stenson** shares with Keith Jarrett are a crystalline keyboard touch, a keen ear for group dynamics, and a loyal and nurturing record label (ECM). For this rare Stateside appearance, the Swedish pianist will be using **Paul Motian,** the brilliant drummer who brought magic to the early bands of—who else?—Keith Jarrett. But Stenson is no mere clone. He has steadily refined his own voice, and is a crafty improviser well worth paying attention to.

CARNEGIE HALL

57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—The once and future genius of the jazz harmonica, **Toots Thielemans,** gets his due on March 16. Among those paying homage are **Herbie Hancock, Joe Lovano, Al Jarreau,** and **Oscar Castro-Neves.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

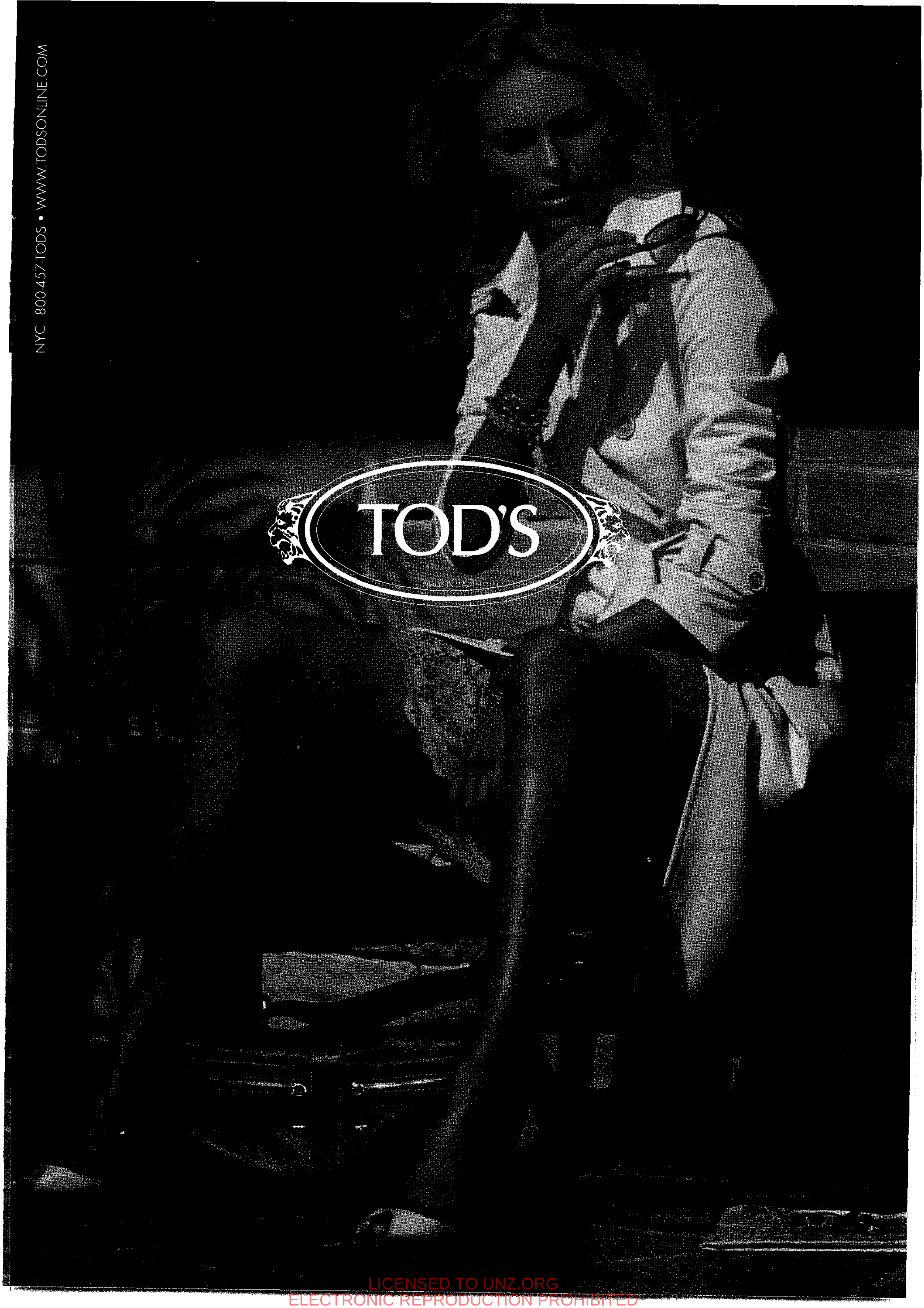
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—March 14-19: It turns out that not every graduate of Juilliard goes on to a career in classical music. The **Juilliard Jazz Quintet,** getting together in honor of the school's centenary, features such noted alumni as the trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon,** the pianist **Ted Rosenthal,** and the drummer **Carl Allen.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 16-19: **Anthony Braxton** has been a genre unto himself for so long that the omnivorously inclusive gadfly shouldn't be surprising to us anymore—yet he always is. Braxton's Twelvetet brings together assorted strings, brass, winds, and electronics, as well as his own edgy alto saxophone. Leave all stylistic expectations at the door. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 15-16: No matter how large his national reputation grows, the pianist **Edward Simon** is not about to forsake his roots; his Venezuelan Project incorporates the music of his homeland by making good use of **Marco Granados's** flute and **Aquiles Baez's** guitar and *cuatro.* On March 17-18, he returns to a more conventional trio, featuring two extravagantly gifted players: the bassist **John Patitucci** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits.**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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK OF THE MOMENT

You are apt to find a visit to the 2006 Whitney Biennial pleasant enough, especially if it's raining out. Bland miscellany rules. Few of the artists display competitive edge or any other distinction, including nationality. This Biennial admits many non-Americans; but, then, nearly everyone seems to hail from the same self-absorbed community without qualities. Strong paintings by Troy Brauntuch and a lovely film by Pierre Huyghe disrupt the prevailing languor, as does a smart selection of politically angry art curated by the Wrong Gallery. A film by T. Kelly Mason and Diana Thater, of girls jumping rope to different versions of a Bob Dylan song, delights. Francesco Vezzoli's "Trailer for a Remake of Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'" is groaning camp. More than two hundred artists participated in the show's hapless centerpiece, an update of the "Peace Tower," an antiwar project from the sulfurous year 1966. Beyond nostalgic, the effect is nigh onto cryogenic, and about as incisive, with its panoply of standard sentiments, as an elementary-school hallway decked out for parents' night.

STILL FROM "JUMP" (2004); T. KELLY MASON AND DIANA THATER

—Peter Schjeldahl

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (212-601-1000)—March 15: The **Howard Fishman** quartet, which is back with its original violinist and cornettist, pays tribute to the late illustrator Al Hirschfeld, who was a fan of the band's old-fashioned swing.

"THE SIDNEY BECHET SOCIETY"
On March 20, **Vince Giordano** leads a stripped-down version of his regular band, the Nighthawks. With **Jon-Erik Kellso** on cornet, **Mark Lopeman** on soprano sax and clarinet, and the multi-instrumentalist leader, the Minihawks have all the requisite verve needed to salute the immortal Bechet. (The Lighthouse, 111 E. 59th St. For more information, call 516-627-4468.)

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—March 13: The vocalist **Shelley Hirsch.** March 14: **Bill Ware.** Often compared to Roy Ayers (known for pop-funk crossover tunes with a jazz background), the vibraphonist Ware was a charter member of the Jazz Passengers and a longtime player with Groove Collective, and he did time on tour in the mid-nineties with Steely Dan. He also writes film scores with his fellow-Passenger Roy Nathanson. (They did the music for the indie hit "Raising Victor Vargas.") Expect original compositions that might fuse the Beatles with Coltrane or slip a hip-hop bass line into a Carpenters tune. March 19: The Stone's curator of the month, **Lawrence D. (Butch) Morris,** has been an innovator at the crossroads of jazz, classical, and new music for more than twenty years. He's a pioneer of "conduction," a method he created of conducting improvisation. Here, he leads his Phantom Station unit, which includes **Miguel Frasconi** on electronics, **Bill Ware** on vibraphone, **Okkyung Lee** on cello, **Eyol Maoz** on guitar, and **Cornelius Dufallo** on violin. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—March 17-18: The violinist **Billy Bang** has demonstrated both ingenuity and courage on his two "Vietnam" albums, making use of improvisers who are also war veterans to explore a melding of Asian music and jazz. He's joined by the venerable saxophonist **James Spaulding,** a standout of last year's release, "Vietnam: Reflections."

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—March 19: The composer **Doug Wieselman,** a ubiquitous member of the avant-jazz and experimental scenes, plays clarinet, sax, and guitar, among other instruments. For years, he has been listening to oceans, rivers, and streams and gleaning natural melodies from their flow. He performs hypnotic and gentle soundscapes with Trio S, featuring the cellist **Jane Scarpantoni** and the drummer **Kenny Wollesen.** His pieces are subtle musical reveries that have a major primordial pull, an elegant expression of evolutionary impulses coupled with (man-made) intelligent design. In this case, there's no reason it can't be both. March 21: The pianist **Misha Mengelberg** and the drummer **Han Bennink,** dogged straddlers of the thin line between musical genius and madness, bring their equally unclassifiable ICP (Instant Composers Pool) Orchestra to town. Among the band's exceptional, if gloriously unruly, soloists are **Michael Moore,** on woodwinds, and **Tristan Honsinger,** on cello.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 14-19: The **Roy Haynes** quartet. Having played drums with Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane, Haynes could very well rest on his laurels. Instead, he takes his role as elder statesman very seriously, nurturing new talent and handing down the secrets of the art of leading an airtight small group. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZEBULON
258 Wythe Ave., between Metropolitan Ave. and 3rd St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-217-6934)—This intimate French-owned music enclave follows in the best tradition of European jazz clubs (minus the smoke). It has a lively atmosphere and is a genuinely warm home for a wide variety of international musicians playing everything from free jazz to world music. And it has yet to charge a cover. March 13-18: **Orchestra Slang,** a sixteen-piece ensemble promising otherworldly music brought together by the drummer Kenny Wollesen, the saxophonist Jonathon Haffner, and the conduction pioneer Lawrence D. (Butch) Morris (see Tonic and the Stone). March 18: An outstanding Zebulon mainstay, **Baye Kouyate** (on talking drum and vocals), radiates with soulful music from his native Mali, including songs by Amadou & Mariam (the blind Malian duo, whose album "Dimanche à Bamako" was produced by Manu Chao).

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Robert Rauschenberg: Combines."** A majestic, exhilarating show of painting-sculpture hybrids dating from the fifties and early sixties. Through April 2. ♦ **"Samuel Palmer (1805-1881): Vision and Landscape."** A major retrospective, co-organized with the British Museum, reviews the work of the Romantic-era landscape painter. Through May 29. ♦ **"Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Emperor Akbar's Illustrated 'Khamsa,' 1597-98."** Manuscripts of the Sufi poet Amir Khusrau Dihlavi's five-tale "Khamsa," currently unbound for conservation, are illustrated with vibrant landscapes, theatrical figures, and intricately drawn *shamsa* rosettes, best seen through a magnifying glass. Through March 12. ♦ **"A Taste for Opulence: Sèvres Porcelain from the Collection."** Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"The Fabric of Life: Ikat Textiles of Indonesia."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"The Armored Horse in Europe, 1480-1620"** is a one-room show of leather and metal examples from the golden age of the obsolete craft of horse armor. Items range from brutally practical sets made for low-ranking soldiers to more fanciful designs displayed by kings in military parades. Through Jan. 14, 2007. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul"** is the first American museum retrospective of the Norwegian artist (1863-1944) in thirty years. Through May 8. ♦ **"Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking."** Poetry mavens might hear in the title an echo of Wallace Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," a virtuosic demonstration of perspective—physical, temporal, and psychological. Artists from Islamic backgrounds provide the perspectives here, gazing back at their culture and homelands, mostly from afar. Unexpectedly, perhaps, women reign. Mona Hatoum, Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, Shahzia Sikander, Shirazeh Houshiary, and Emily Jacir make work ranging from formal riffs on traditional Muslim aesthetics (miniatures, manuscripts, calligraphy, and carpets) to photography, video, and animation. Oddball objects, like Mike Kelley's remake of an Ottoman carpet in Irish green, add a dose of levity that is, save for excerpts from Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel "Persepolis," otherwise absent. Through May 22. ♦ **"Take Two. Worlds and Views: Contemporary Art from the Collection"** has filled the second-floor contemporary galleries for several months, but the selection is now about to turn over. This will be the last chance for a while to see these works, which include Dana Schutz's ten-by-fourteen-foot painting "Presentation" (2005) and Janet Cardiff's awe-inspiring audio piece "40 Part Motet. A Reworking of *Spem in Alium* by Thomas Tallis." Through March 21. ♦ The retrospective **"John Szarkowski: Photographs."** Through May 15. ♦ **"On-Site: New Architecture in Spain."** Through May 1. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"David Smith: A Centennial."** Smith (1906-65) parlayed

BATU KALI COLLECTION

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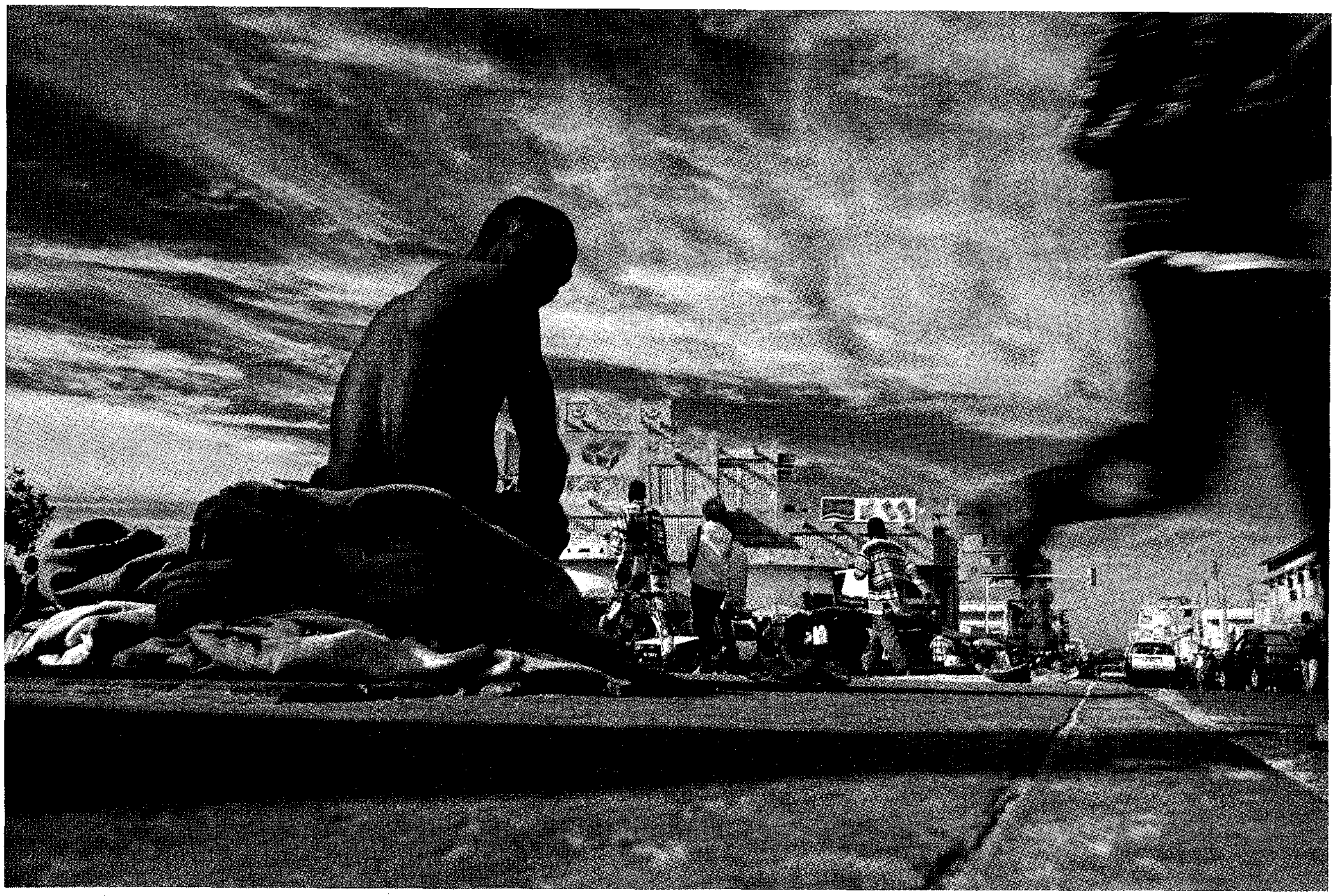


"Dakar," by Boubcar Toure Mandemory, at I.C.P. in "Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography."

his experiences as a welder, an employee of the Studebaker company, a painter, and an acolyte of the Cubist movement into tremendous steel sculptures that were championed by Clement Greenberg and have become emblems of American modernism. Through May 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Day for Night,"** the 2006 Biennial, curated by Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles. There are more than a hundred artists represented. Through May 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA

120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Andrea Zittel: Small Liberties."** Concurrent with the New Museum's retrospective, the Whitney presents a selection of customized "Wagon Stations" made at Zittel's A-Z West project in the desert near Joshua Tree, California. Through May 7. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"William Wegman: Funney/Strange."** This major retrospective goes beyond endearing, anthropomorphic photographs of Weimaraners (though those are here, too) with forty years of the artist's paintings, drawings, videos, and films. Through May 28. ♦ **"Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a recreation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas like those that he encountered in the Galápagos Islands. Through May 29. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for the eighth year. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—When did black clothes become the sign of sober conservatism and knowing chic? Why did seventeenth-century tastemakers alter their stern opinions about patterned motley? Is yellow still the color of frivolity, as it was for eighteenth-century dandies and ladies dressed *à la française*? The answers, along with sixty-eight exquisite representative garments designed by everyone from Chanel to Kawakubo, are presented in **"Fashion in Colors,"** a sampler from the eleven-thousand-piece collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute, which preserves Western designs. Organized by hue rather than by date, the exhibition tracks chemical-dye innovations (when color got cheap, black became classic) and Asian influences on European style (imported silks stimulated the use of complex patterns and bright shades). Through March 26. ♦ For an institution with a large, and mostly unseen, collection, the artist-as-curator offers a surefire exhibition strategy. It works charmingly in **"Yinka Shonibare Selects,"** with the Nigerian-British artist plundering the Cooper-Hewitt's storerooms to mount a small, expansive show examining fantasies of transportation, enclosure, and release. Through May 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER

35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—The Drawing Center's spring "Selections" show eschews paper in favor of film, turning the Drawing Room project space into a screening room for **"Analog Animations."** There's hardly a digital effect in sight, with emphasis on hand-drawn images that create movement the old-fashioned way, frame by painstakingly altered frame. Collage, erasure, cutout light gels, and silhouettes appear; there's also a multipanel, extremely low-tech flip book in the front window, and a video in which live spiders collaborate by spinning webs around tiny drawings suspended in their way. Among the eighteen participants are Mark Fox, Anna Kiraly, Kakyoung Lee, and Deborah Davidovits. Through April 15. ♦ **"Joëlle Tuerlinckx: Drawing Inventory"** is the Belgian artist's first exhibition in New York. Through April 22. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Goya's Last Works."** Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5. The galleries for the Goya exhibition will stay open until 8 on Friday evenings for the duration of the show.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

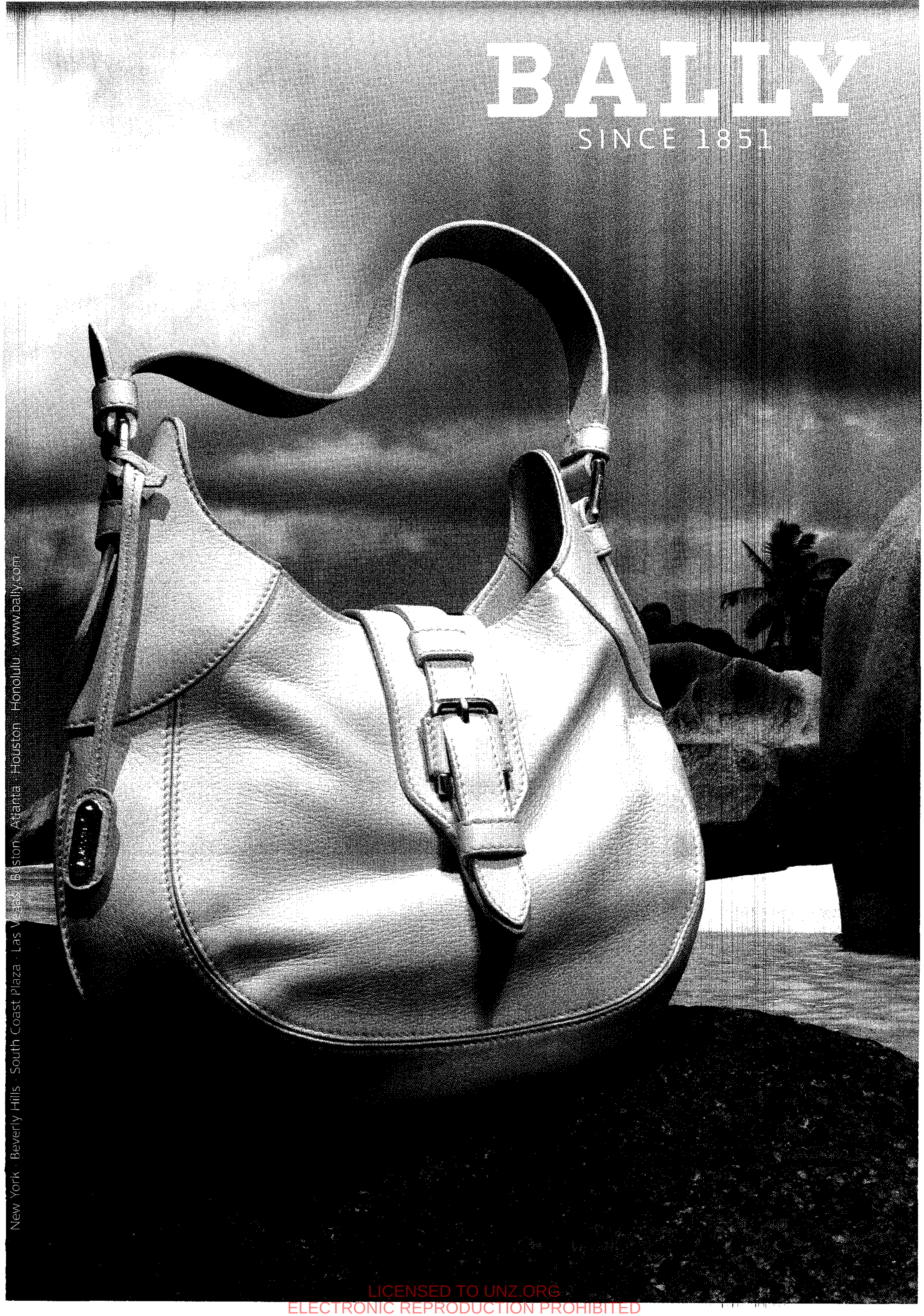
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography."** Through May 28. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—Working materials and projects from the early career of the Cuban-born artist **Felix Gonzalez-Torres** (1957-96) are exhibited alongside more mature efforts. A black-and-white video self-portrait, "Autorretrato Numero 3" (1979), uncannily recalls Warhol's screen tests. Published photographs and texts from his "newspaper art" student days in Puerto Rico are displayed in tear sheets from *El Nuevo Día* and the San Juan *Star*. Gonzalez-Torres is best known, of course, for floor installations using heaps of wrapped hard candy or printed posters stacked in formations resembling minimalist sculptures. Three examples of the poster stacks are here, including one with a lovely black-and-white water image that recalls Stieglitz. As always, viewers are encouraged to take one home. Through May 21. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN

40 W. 53rd St. (212-956-3535)—A show about sustainability recycles selections from several recent exhibitions, including pieces by Andrea Zittel and Michael Rakowitz (whose work was re-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cently on view in MOMA's "Safe: Design Takes on Risk"). **"Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art"** is a powerhouse nonetheless, filled with work, mostly utopian in nature, that blurs the categories of design and sculpture and delves into the politics of housing, land use, energy, and safety. The work that captures the most attention, possibly, is the least pragmatic—particularly shown alongside living pods and solar-powered communications. Allora & Calzadilla's video shows a man driving a conference table, overturned and outfitted with an outboard motor, around the island of Vieques, in Puerto Rico. Here, a gesture of protest becomes an unlikely, poetic source of beauty. Through May 7. (Open daily, 10 to 6; and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Treasures from Olana: Landscapes by Frederic Edwin Church"** presents a selection of highly finished oil sketches. The Parthenon, the El Khasné temple at Petra, Mt. Chimborazo, in Ecuador, and Niagara's Horseshoe Falls glitter in miniature, less majestic than Church's monumental finished works but still magical. Through April 30. ♦ **"For Spacious Skies: Hudson River School Paintings from the Henry and Sharon Martin Collection."** Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Klee and America"** surveys the dialogue between the artist, whose work was influenced by Native American art, and this country, which embraced him in the thirties and forties, when he was suffering rejection as "degenerate" in Austria. Through May 22. (Open Thursdays and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Temporarily situated in the Chelsea Art Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—**"Andrea Zittel: Critical Space,"** a retrospective of the artist's highly specialized vehicles, living units, furnishings, textiles, and "uniforms" (which she constructs and wears for six months at a stretch). Futuristic fantasies of streamlined practicality aside, no other artist so thoroughly addresses the intersection of consumerism and community. Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—In 1703, forty-two per cent of all households in New York held slaves. The economic underpinnings of the international trade in slave labor made the Port of New York—the financial center of the New World—a natural hub for traffic in kidnapped Africans, while its bustling urban population also attracted freed persons and fugitives. In the nineteenth century, as abolitionist feeling grew, the city offered a forum to orators like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. **"Slavery in New York"** examines these topics and much more, with an installation loaded with statistics and documents. Most effective are the audio renderings of letters, diary entries, and court proceedings detailing the daily lives of black and white New Yorkers caught up in the "peculiar institution." Through March 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—In honor of the renovation of the library's Map Division, some wonders from the archives are unfolded in **"Treasured Maps."** Cartographic studies of everything from God's creation of the universe (Eden and the Land of Nod are shown floating in a sea of formless darkness) to the New York subway system in the seventies are on view. Organized into sections, the exhibition examines representations of the New World, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the five boroughs and Long Island. Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"The Imagery of Chess Revisited."** The notion of play is central to modern art, from the ubiquitous "JOU" in Cubist paintings to the antics of the Surrealists. A 1944 exhibition at the Julien Levy gallery, organized by Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst and titled "The Imagery of Chess," set the precedent for this game-inspired show. A replica of Ernst's boxwood chess set from the Levy exhibition is here, along with sets by Man Ray, Alexander Calder, André Breton, and, of course, Isamu Noguchi. Duchamp's chess notations, mid-century photographs, and ephemera, as well as sculptures and drawings by Giacometti, Motherwell, Dorothea Tanning, Matta, and John Cage, provide a feast for the eyes. At the same time, the show underscores Duchamp's bias against purely "retinal" art and toward a practice driven by intellectual gamesmanship. Through April 16. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Rigged like an insane campsite in the museum's duplex project room, Jessica Stockholder's installation incorporates a picnic table, a bunch of plastic storage bins, a faux-fur throw, an armchair, and lots and lots of fat orange power cords. Stockholder's constructions are always as painterly as they are sculptural, managing to appear almost two-dimensional in spite of their exuberant extension into space. Here she relies on primary colors and a kooky implied narrative of coziness-gone-wrong to activate the cavernous gallery. One wishes, in fact, for even more material and visual intensity. The piece, which is titled **"Of Standing Float Roots in Thin Air,"** is almost too well balanced. Through May 1. ♦ **"Jessica Rankin: The Measure of Every Pause."** Through May 1. ♦ **"Wolfgang Tillmans: Freedom from the Known."** Through May 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURE CENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—"The art of losing isn't hard to master," Elizabeth Bishop wrote in her poem "One Art." **Anya Gallaccio** borrows Bishop's title for a meditation on themes of decay and reclamation. Her piece is a huge dead tree, a weeping cherry cut into pieces and bolted back together in the Sculpture Center's soaring industrial space, so that its branches graze the iron beams and clerestory windows fifty feet above the ground. The tree was salvaged from a construction site and has no roots—held up by guy wires and brutally scaffolded by metal struts, it projects a monstrous, captive grace. Through April 3. ♦ The latest iteration of the **"In Practice Projects"** series presents the work of eight young artists grappling with the venue's catacombish basement and high-walled, gravel-strewn courtyard. Standouts are Mary Temple's barely there wall work—what appears to be a leafy shadow cast against a subterranean wall is in fact painted on—and Monika Zarzeczna's cell-like installation of a desk, a lamp, and a litter of small, awkwardly posed portraits. Be sure to check the schedule to see Xavier Cha perform his weekly Cossack dance. Through April 3. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM
222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—**"The Tree of Life, the Sun, the Goddess: Symbolic Motifs in Ukrainian Folk Art."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

TIM DAVIS
James Welling's similarly encyclopedic and idiosyncratic photographs of light sources would seem to be the inspiration for Davis's new "Illuminations" series, which includes pictures of a chandelier, neon lettering ("CAR ACCIDENT"), klieg lights, fluorescent tubes, and the multiple shadows cast by spotlit museum statuary. Twelve of the latter images open the show with a frieze of abstraction that's echoed in a nearby video of X-rayed baggage slipping across the screen like deflated ghosts. Though the gap between minor and terrific work here is unusually wide, Davis's fo-

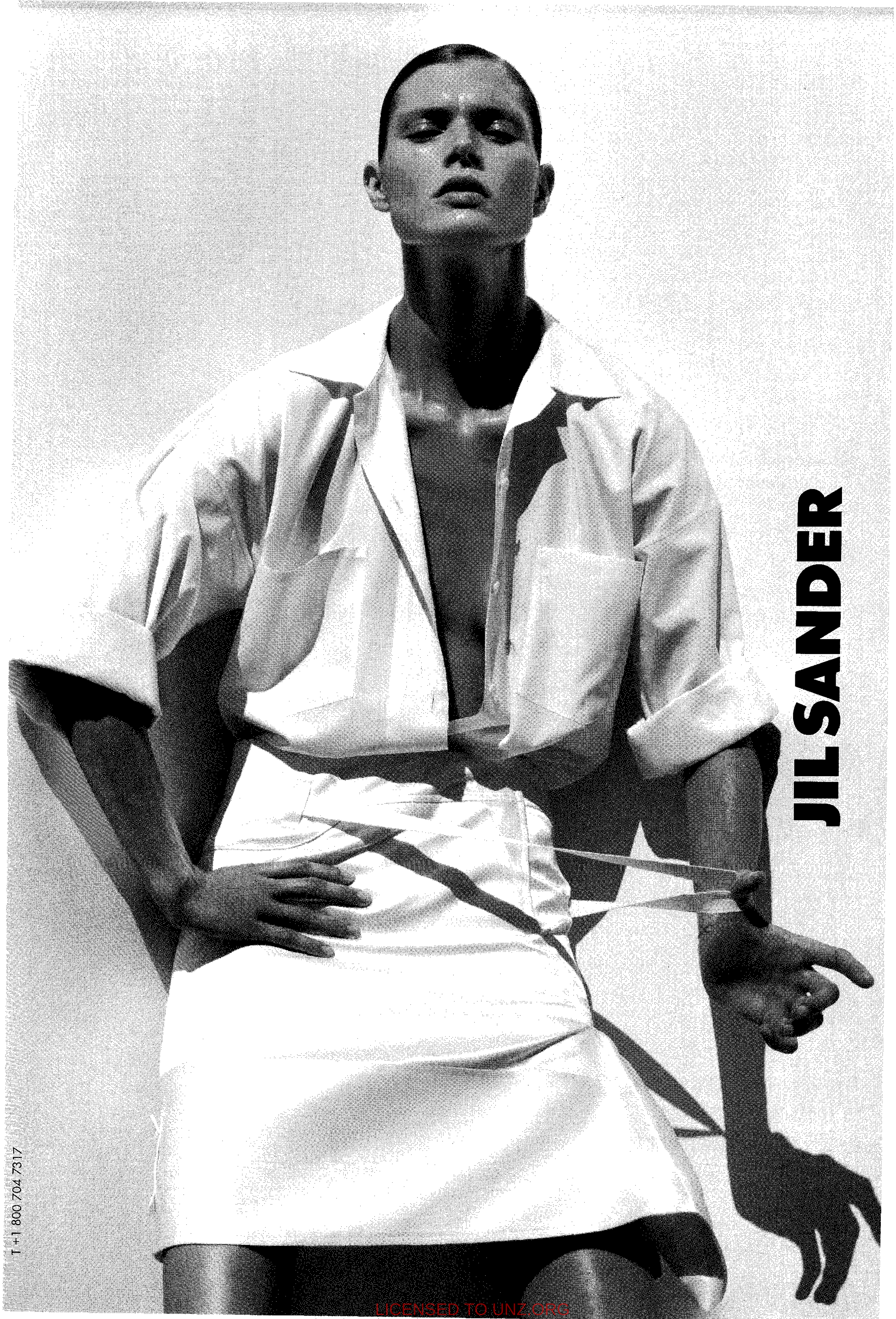
TABLES FOR TWO
TELEPAN

72 W. 69th St. (212-580-4300)—Entering this Upper West Side restaurant, just off Columbus Avenue and among the brownstones, feels something like being entertained in the home of a wealthy, extremely solicitous host. It's not just the preserved lineaments of the renovated town house that it occupies; it's also the well-spaced seating and eager-to-please staff, the warm, pea-green walls, and the unobtrusive yet oddball art. (One large painting shows a strapping young farmer, wearing a gimme cap, striking a pose before a silo.)

Although the chef, Bill Telepan, has long been a practitioner of seasonal cooking (his last restaurant, Judson Grill, closed in 2004), he wears his ideals lightly. The results are not uniformly excellent, but for every mediocre bit there's something lively and unique. A quail appetizer was too drab to merit the unwieldy effort to strip the meat from the bone; the accompanying apple-duck sausage was flavorful but dry and crumbly. The black-truffle pierogi, on the other hand, had a bold flavor and a creamy texture, and the outstanding yellowtail tabbouleh consisted of sweet slabs of raw fish over chewy grains laced with cured tuna and mint. The entrées tended to tread safer paths, with less satisfactory results. The salmon—the waitress added, "I tell people right up front that it's farmed, not wild, after that article about places that try to trick you"—was heavily breaded, and the chicken, while nicely roasted, was forgettable. Even here, though, there was compensation: the duck, served with foie-gras custard, was delicately indulgent. (At lunchtime, when the place loosens up a little, there's a fine burger, accompanied by housemade pickles and a "volcano" of softly battered onion rings and fries.)

And so it went with dessert. A smooth peanut-butter-and-milk-chocolate gianduja was classically satisfying, but it arrived with an incongruous heap of huckleberry gelée, which didn't quite pull off its presumed evocation of jelly. Still, the sensation of a coddled life persisted: as soon as one ventured from the table, a neatly suited server stepped up as a polite, perfectly discreet escort, and a parting gift of rich chocolate truffles arrived, already boxed up to go. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays for lunch and daily for dinner. Entrées $15.50-$36.)

—*Andrea Thompson*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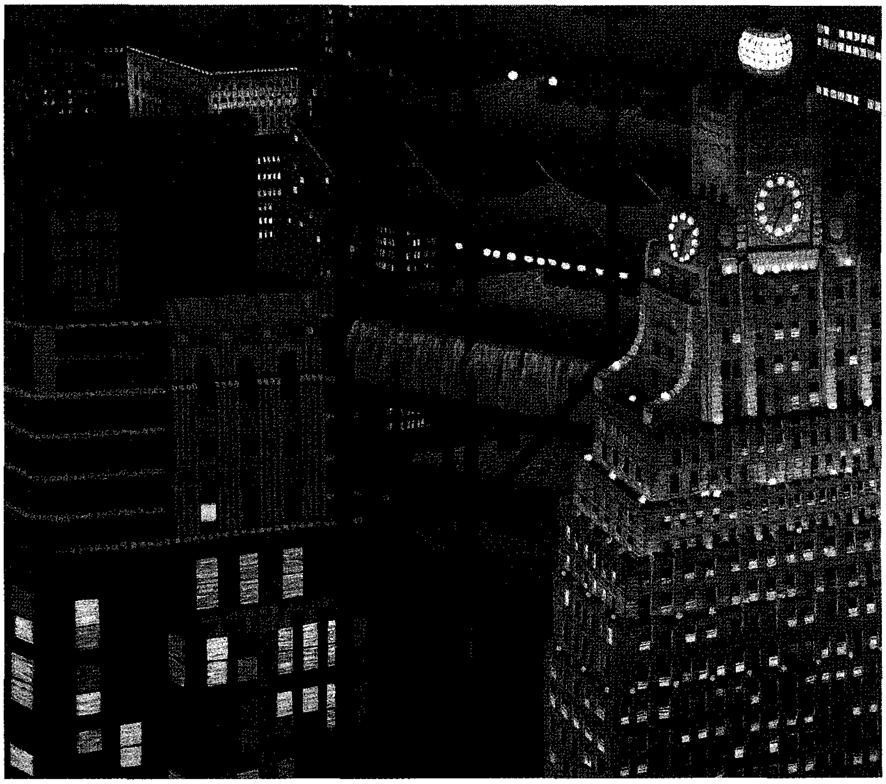
cussed intelligence carries the show. Through March 18. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave. 212-445-0444.)

Short List

ERIC FISCHL: Yoshii, 17 E. 76th St. 212-744-5550. Through March 18. **YVONNE JACQUETTE:** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-247-2111. Opens March 18. **KORI NEWKIRK:** The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-1585. Through March 24. **FRANCIS PICABIA:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through April 15. **ALEXEY TITARENKO / PENTTI SAMMALLAHTI:** Nailya Alexander and Candace Dwan, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211. Through April 1. **TOM WESSELMANN:** L & M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through April 15.



Yvonne Jacquette's painting "Above Times Square" (2003), uptown at DC Moore.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SEBASTIAAN BREMER
Found photographs, blown up to giant scale and blurred toward abstraction, are the supports for Bremer's drawings. Delicate traceries of white ink pick out some details and add to or obscure others, turning the snapshots into pseudo paintings that comment on the tradition of Dutch still-life. Plates and glasses, a skull, or a dead swan emerge as elements of *vanitas*, while moments of Rembrandtian self-portraiture and Boschian monstrosity pop up here and there. Other images address contemporary life more directly—a child glides underwater through a piercingly blue swimming pool, and a gray glacier slides through a mountain valley. Through March 25. (Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180.)

JUDITH EISLER
Eisler offers a pantheon of fuzzy fragments in her paintings, with images cribbed from frames frozen on her television. The hands strumming a guitar in "Keith" presumably belong to the Rolling Stones rocker. The back of a curly head haloed by spotlights in "Loretta" can only be Lynn, and "Smoker (Ewan)" calls to mind the Scottish actor McGregor. Patrolling the boundaries between painting and photography (and TV and film), the paintings cover territory similar to that of Gerhard Richter, without reaching his heights. Where Eisler succeeds is in tapping into our collective unconscious—the reservoir of mass-media references that served Richard Prince so well in breakout works like his similarly fuzzy (re)photographs of the Marlboro Man. Through March 25. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave. 212-206-8710.)

JULIE HEFFERNAN
Ironic rococo surrealism with a social-satirical twist, Heffernan's new work ponders the fantastical landscape as emotional and political metaphor. Overrun with flora and fauna of every stripe, her pearly, verdant canvases writhe with fruity anachronism. Embowered in roses and watched over by serpents, a squad of spacemen wrestle a giant squid; gladiators and G.I.s share a pastoral battlefield where the real threat lurks in the tumbling contents of a huge cornucopia; and a village labelled "Shock and Awe" is menaced by grotesquely flourishing foliage. Through March 18. (P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

HORST P. HORST
This solid, witty survey, selected by the photographer Sante D'Orazio, may not succeed in repositioning Horst's cool neoclassicism for the postmodern age, but it does reassert his influence on Robert Mapplethorpe, Herb Ritts, Kurt Markus, and Michael Thompson, among others in and out of fashion. Fashion is only one element of the mix here, which ranges from the thirties to the eighties and is just as strong in still-life, portraiture (Noël Coward, Luchino Visconti, Gloria Vanderbilt, Cecil Beaton), and the male and female nude. Little-seen color work, primarily stylized flower studies, looks even more vivid in Horst's elegant black-and-white world. Through March 15. (Holm, 524 W. 24th St. 212-627-7444.)

JEFF CHIEN-HSING LIAO
Fresh out of the School of Visual Arts' M.F.A. program, Liao shows off his impressive digital-composing skills in a series of panoramic urban landscapes set along the No. 7 subway line in Queens. Like a contemporary O. Winston Link, Liao includes passing trains in several of his images, but he's more interested in the varieties of metropolitan life served and sustained by the subway artery. His richly detailed and seamlessly manipulated photographs include overhead views of

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P.S. 1, a graffiti-covered building (with a lone artist at work), and a street lined with auto-body shops, all enlivened by seemingly serendipitous confluences of passengers and passersby as well as by an almost painterly feel for color and light. Through March 25. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

TONY OURSLER
Oursler has always functioned like a neo-Surrealist, creating uncanny video-sculpture and mining uncomfortable regions of the psyche. The work at Metro functions in this vein but with more focus on formal effects. Darkened rooms hold biomorphic shapes onto which swirly images are projected. Human eyes and lips blink and mutter indecipherable stream-of-consciousness monologues; celestial projections hover on the walls. Over at Nyehaus, the Surrealist love of accident and chance, filtered through the composer John Cage, is flexed in a seven-screen video work in which musicians (Kim Gordon and Lee Ranaldo, of Sonic Youth, the outré minimalist Tony Conrad, Zeena Parkins, Stephen Vitiello, J. G. Thirlwell, and Ikue Mori) play guitars, computers, and bells—not always in the intended manner—to create music that is constantly morphing. Through March 25 and mid-April, respectively. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100; Nyehaus, 15 Gramercy Park S. 212-995-1785.)

DAN WALSH
Walsh turns geometric abstract painting into a high-concept joke by playing off the austerity of Josef Albers, Kenneth Noland, early Frank Stella, and Agnes Martin. The humor may be lost on most viewers, however, unless grids painted in zippy fuchsia and crimson, or horizontal stripes mimicking window blinds, are their idea of fun. The canvases are hung low on the wall, further clarifying the divide between earthbound viewer and art on high. Even with these measures, Walsh seems to be working harder at remaking late-modern abstraction and forcing a dialogue with the past than at tilling new aesthetic ground. Through March 18. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

SU-EN WONG
A series of colorful new paintings continue Wong's theme of autoerotic schoolgirl high jinks. Multiple copies of her happily perverse self play field hockey, go swimming, roller-skate, dress up as Indian chiefs, and clamber around on seaside rocks. Turned out in polka-dot socks and Mary Janes, tartan jumpers and straight-cut bangs, the gaggles of females are heavily coded as "innocent." They're not, of course, and they flash bared bums and fondle one another in a most inappropriate manner. Wong employs a tight, illustrational style in a palette of hot pastels, and when she paints her "girls" nude they turn out to be robust, non-waifish, and plausible self-portraits. Through March 18. (Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

"EXQUISITE CORPSE—CADAVRE EXQUIS"
Participants in this famous Surrealist parlor game would fold pieces of paper and add sections to a drawing (or words to a sentence) to create a collective work via chance. The wacky results, they felt, mirrored the erratic juxtapositions in dreams and the unconscious. The gallerist Mitchell Algus and the curator Bob Nikas have replicated the game's structure by riffing off one another's curatorial cues. A mid-seventies photograph of Christopher Rauschenberg (son of Robert) touching penises with a pal is answered by one of Jeff Davis's recent visionary-erotic drawings. Other entries in the sequence pay distinct homage to their Surrealist forebears, like a Jules Kirschenbaum painting of pterodactyls invading a playground, originally exhibited in a 1956 Whitney Annual devoted to painting. Through March 18. (Algus, 511 W. 25th St. 212-242-6242.)

"MOTORE IMMOBILE"
The premise for this group show could be described as a chilly passion for impossible-to-use objects—chilly because all the things in question are somehow clunky, ugly, or intentionally deadening; passion because those same things seem, despite their inutility, so urgently desired and designed. Examples: Lee Lozano's big, brushy painting of a fantastical three-headed hammer; Tony Conrad's "movie," a huge black rectangle painted on a piece of yellowed white paper; or Rachel Harrison's nutty, slutty assemblage "Nice Rack," which consists of fake-pearl barrettes, a snow shovel, and a tacky painting of Ronald Reagan, all hung on a metal display rack. Also among the participants are Stuart Sherman, Marcel Broodthaers, and Christopher Williams. Through April 1. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

Short List

TOMORY DODGE: CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766. Through April 1. **KAREN FINLEY:** Gray Kapernekas, 526 W. 26th St. 212-462-4150. Through March 18. **LOUISE FISHMAN:** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through March 25. **SHIRAZEH HOUSHIARY:** Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through March 25. **ALFREDO JAAR:** Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through March 18. **WILLIAM LAVEN:** Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081. Through April 15. **WILLIAM NICHOLSON:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave. 212-563-4474. Through March 25. **MICHAL ROVNER:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through March 18. **RACHEL WHITEREAD:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through April 1.

CLASSICAL NOTES
THE KING'S ENGLISH

The days when Handel's **"Messiah"** was offered as a big strings-and-brass spectacular are long past, but most performances still maintain a friendly holiday cheer—something completely absent from Nikolaus Harnoncourt's new recording of the work (on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi). This is a "Messiah" in the spirit of the Bach Passions—a sober and serious affair that values Germanic analytical precision over British ruddiness and warmth. (The "Hallelujah Chorus" sounds exquisite, though subdued.) But Harnoncourt, an early-music paragon who cut his teeth as a cellist in the Vienna Symphony, has a fondness for lush sounds, and the softly radiant colors of the Concentus Musicus Wien and the disciplined energy of the Arnold Schoenberg Choir, along with the conductor's predilection for jagged rhythms and soaring melodies, more than compensate for any emotional dryness.

Much of the music featured in **"Love Blows as the Wind Blows,"** a new album from the young New Zealand bass-baritone Jonathan Lemalu (on EMI), shows that a certain Handelian decorum still held sway over British vocal music in the early twentieth century. Songs by Quilter and Finzi have an undeniable charm, but the most vibrant pieces are by composers in the American orbit—such as Barber's "Dover Beach," which Lemalu (accompanied by the Belcea Quartet) performs with an impressively robust lyricism.

It was Benjamin Britten, of course, who finally opened up British song composition to more progressive Continental influences. The tenor Ian Bostridge's new recording of three great orchestral song cycles—"Les Illuminations," the "Serenade," and the "Nocturne"—with Simon Rattle conducting the Berlin Philharmonic (EMI), is a direct challenge to Britten's own recordings with his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, made in 1959 and 1963. The elder man gives the "Serenade" a supple, elegiac quality that is more than mere nostalgia, but in the "Nocturne," a discursive and mysterious cycle that has never been as popular as the other two works, Bostridge transcends his predecessor. In a tonally attractive but disturbingly detailed performance, he unmasks the piece as a searing tragedy that links Britten's political concerns with his homosexual obsessions. He and Rattle give the work's final moments, in which the composer quotes the last movement of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony, an almost shocking power.

—*Russell Platt*

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

"UNLIKELY ANGEL: DWIGHT RIPLEY AND THE NEW YORK SCHOOL"
A fairy tale of the mid-century avant-garde unfolds in this show, which chronicles the financial, aesthetic, and comradely support offered to a glittering coterie of artists by the American railroad heir Dwight Ripley and his English botanist boyfriend, Rupert Barneby. As a benefactor of the Tibor de Nagy gallery and its influential poetry press, Ripley was a friend to painters like Helen Frankenthaler, Alfred Leslie, and Grace Hartigan and the poets Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, and Barbara Guest. Paintings, first editions, letters, diaries, and photographs are displayed, along with Ripley's whimsical colored-pencil drawings. Through March 18. (Poets House, 72 Spring St. 212-431-7920.)

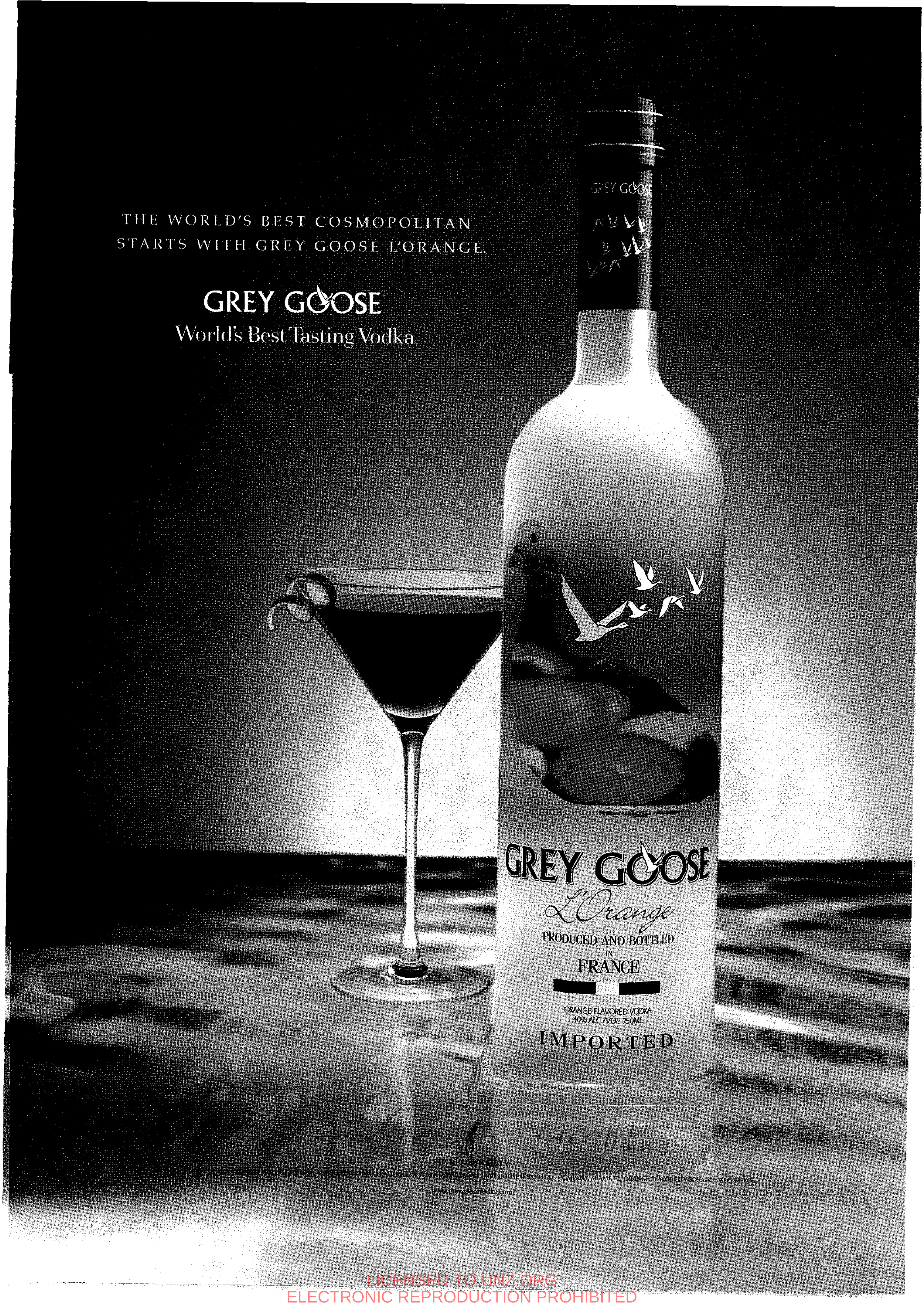
Short List

LEON GOLUB: Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232. Through March 18. **"LINE AND SURFACE":** Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through March 25.

DANCE

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
BAM's monthlong celebration of the company's twenty-fifth anniversary continues with a double bill of danced short operas. "Four Saints in Three Acts," Morris's 2000 interpretation of the 1934 cause célèbre, hews closely to Virgil Thomson's hymnlike score and Gertrude Stein's sound-over-sense libretto. It's whimsical, even jokey, but serious in its equation of simplicity and spirituality. "Dido and Aeneas," Morris's 1989 reimagining of Purcell's 1689 opera, is more extreme: sexually explicit and authentically, brutally tragic. The double role of the Queen of Carthage and her nemesis, the Sorceress, was Morris's greatest part. Now, for the first time, he gives it up, dividing it between Amber Darragh and Bradon McDonald. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. March 15 and March 17-18 at 7:30. Through March 25.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
True to form, in his season's final week Paul Taylor offers visions of Heaven, Hell, and a tragicomic earth. The lovely Heather Berest, dancing in her tenth and final New York season with the company, shows her range: she's a severe Puritan in "Speaking in Tongues" and a vaudeville comedienne in "Dream Girls." In "Esplanade," she is again the familiar, lissome girl in the long pants, and in a revival of "Arabesque" (1999) she has a harsh,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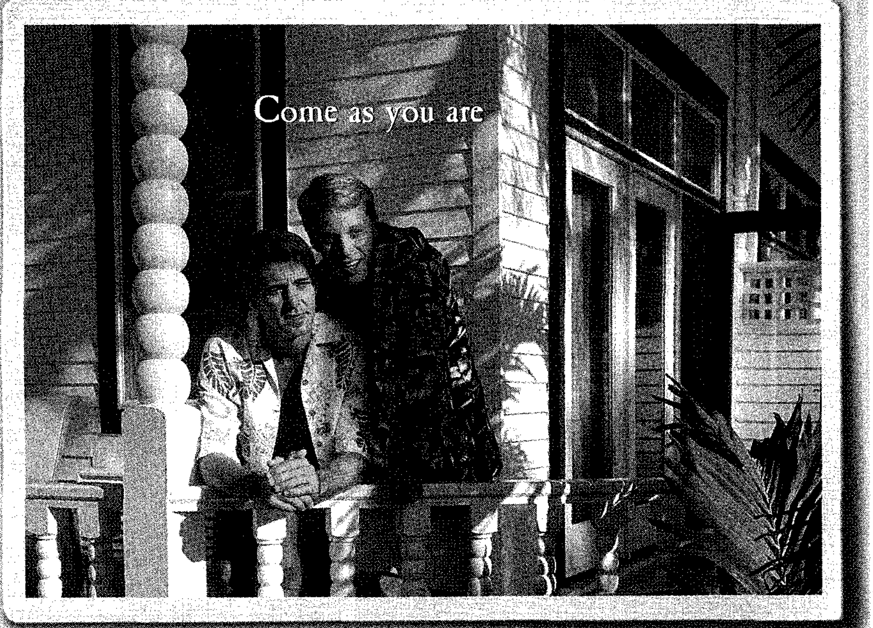

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hair-raising solo. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 15-17 at 8, March 18 at 2 and 8, and March 19 at 3.)

BENJAMIN MILLEPIED & COMPANY

The ambitious twenty-eight-year-old New York City Ballet principal dancer, characterized by his wispy silhouette, dreamy presence, and billowing jumps, began making dances a few years ago and had a pas de deux ("Double Aria") performed by City Ballet last May. His own company, now in its fourth year, is made up mostly of dancers from the City Ballet, and has its Joyce début this week, with four new works by an international cast of young choreographers: Millepied himself (from France), Andonis Foniadakis (from Greece), Luca Veggetti (from Italy), and Aszure Barton (from Canada). "Closer," Millepied's second piece to Philip Glass's "Mad Rush," will be performed by Millepied and Gillian Murphy, of A.B.T., to live piano accompaniment. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. March 14 and March 16-18 at 8 and March 19 at 2 and 7:30.)

SUSAN MARSHALL & COMPANY

Marshall concludes her company's twentieth-anniversary season at Dance Theatre Workshop. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 15-18 at 7:30.)

YVONNE MEIER

The Swiss-born choreographer, an acclaimed specialist in improvisation, presents two new works at the Kitchen after a four-year lull. In the first, "This Is Not a Pink Pony," a trio of performers follow a series of rules, worked out in advance with Meier, which require them to jump rope as they make references to recent movies. In the second, "Gogolorez," Meier calls out instructions to a less inhibited group (including Miguel Gutierrez, Jennifer Monson, and DD Dorvillier), asking them to do everything the first group wouldn't, including what she calls "the no-no list"—the perverse, the ugly, the obscene. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. March 16-18 at 8.)

COMPLEXIONS

The flashy, charismatic contemporary-ballet company of the former Ailey principals Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson offers a world première and two revivals. In Rhoden's brand-new "Artifice," the sleek dancers play outsized characters with names like Twist Lime Divine and Ace Heartbreak, vamping through a series of sketches set to everything from John Adams to Regina Spektor. Richardson gives the big-band solo from Rhoden's "Showman's Groove" the full charge of his electric personality; "Higher Ground," a suite of dances for the entire company to Earth, Wind & Fire tunes, shows Rhoden's unabashedly pop side. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-563-2266. March 17 at 7, March 18 at 2 and 7, and March 19 at noon and 5. Through March 26.)

TCHAIKOVSKY BALLET AND ORCHESTRA

The company, which is based in Perm (an industrial city in the Urals) and is considered by many to be Russia's third-best ballet troupe, brings its new production of "Swan Lake" to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. This version, faithful to the classical, romantic tradition of the Petipa-Ivanov ballet (with touches of Ashton), was created last year by the legendary ballerina Natalia Makarova, perhaps the defining Odette of her time, who also directs. The company principal Natalia Moiseeva will be performing the contrasting roles of Odette and Odile. (1 Center St., Newark, N.J. 888-466-5722. March 17 at 7:30.)

LES BALLETS AFRICAINS

"Jubilee," the Guinean ensemble's fiftieth-anniversary greatest-hits program, is one long jam session for the thirty drummers, musicians, and dancers. Traditional costumes, scenery, and instruments set the tone for an old-fashioned folkloric show, but the format is more like jazz improvisation—drummers and pounding heels setting the rhythm, with back flips and flutes riffing above it. Directed by Hamidou Bangoura. (Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-992-8484. March 17-18 at 8.)

DANCEBRAZIL

The capoeira-based troupe offers "Retratos da Bahia," which brings to life the images in Pierre Verger's famous book of photographs capturing

Afro-Brazilian culture. (Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, Lehman College, the Bronx. 718-960-8833. March 19 at 3.)

"DANCEOFF!"
Terry Dean Bartlett (the associate director of STREB) and the Brooklyn-based dancer-choreographer Katie Workum present a new edition of their eclectic "not really a dance competition" series, in which emerging artists try out new works in a format that allows for a tremendous range of styles. This time around, the lineup includes a seven-minute digital media/animation/dance piece by Jonah Bokaer and a snippet from a work in progress by Cynthia Hopkins, inspired by an opera, never realized, that Stravinsky was planning with Dylan Thomas, improbably set in outer space. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101. March 21-22 at 8 and 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
March 15 at 8: **"La Forza del Destino,"** with Elena Zelenskaya, Mary Phillips (in her Met début), Salvatore Licitra, Mark Rucker, Juan Pons, and Vitalij Kowaljow; Gianandrea Noseda conducts. ♦ March 18 at 8: With Deborah Voigt replacing Zelenskaya. ♦ March 16 at 8: A certain tinge of nostalgia will doubtless ameliorate the dramatic weaknesses of Franco Alfano's **"Cyrano de Bergerac,"** with Plácido Domingo returning to the leading role in the last performance of the run. Also with the excellent Sondra Radvanovsky, Raymond Very, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Marco Armiliato. ♦ March 17 and March 21 at 8: Verdi's **"Luisa Miller,"** with Veronica Villarroel, Irina Mishura, Neil Shicoff, Carlos Alvarez, James Morris, and Phillip Ens; Maurizio Benini. ♦ March 18 at 1:30: The Met's long association with the conductor Valery Gergiev has brought forth a number of exciting Russian novelties. The latest is Tchaikovsky's **"Mazeppa,"** which features a cast headed by Olga Guryakova, Larissa Diadkova, Nikolai Putilin, and Paata Burchuladze. ♦ March 20 at 7:30: Whenever Karita Mattila—the greatest Scandinavian soprano since Birgit Nilsson—returns to the Met, it is an occasion. She takes the title role in **"Fidelio,"** Beethoven's happy symphony of freedom and justice, which has the added attraction of Jürgen Flimm's bracing production, set in a police state of vaguely twentieth-century provenance. Also with Jennifer Welch-Babidge, Richard Margison (as Florestan), Gregory Turay, Alan Held, Kristinn Sigmundsson, and James Morris; James Levine. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
March 16 at 7:30 and March 18 at 8: James Robinson's production of **"La Bohème,"** set in Paris during the First World War. With Kelly Kaduce, Shannah Timms, Gerard Powers, and Grant Youngblood; Steven White conducts. ♦ March 17 at 8 and March 18-19 at 1:30: Paul Sorvino and Lisa Vroman star in a revival of Frank Loesser's very operatic musical **"The Most Happy Fella"**; George Manahan. ♦ March 21 at 7:30: Mark Adamo, like Gian Carlo Menotti at his best, is a composer-librettist whose work combines a smart and tuneful style with effortless dramatic flair. Having scored a hit with his version of "Little Women," he returns with **"Lysistrata, or the Nude Goddess,"** a wartime comedy freely adapted from the play by Aristophanes. Emily Pulley, Myrna Paris, Jennifer Rivera, and Chad Shelton sing in the New York première production; Manahan. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Xian Zhang, the orchestra's associate conductor, leads a slate of classical favorites: Rossini's "L'Italiana in Algeri" Overture, Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Ingolf Turban, making his Philharmonic début), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5. (March 16 at 7:30, March 17 at 11 A.M., and March 18 at 8.) ♦ Zhang conducts the Tchaikovsky on a

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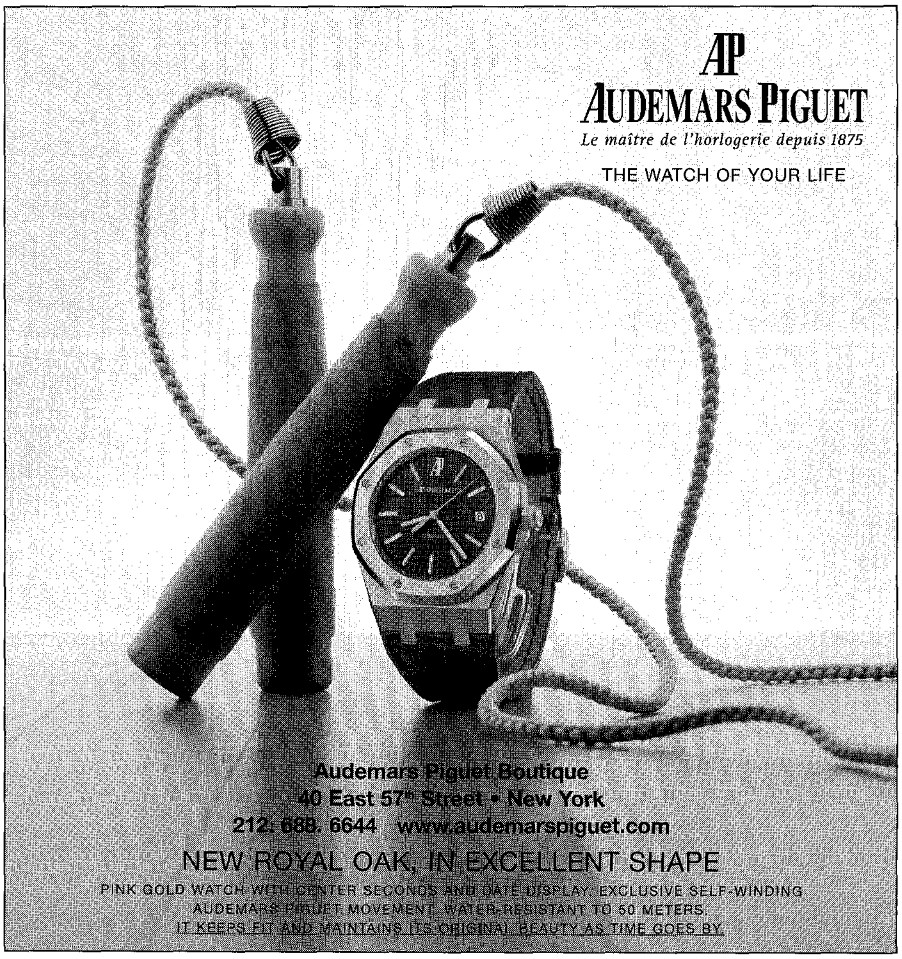
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Saturday-matinée program that will also include two chamber works for winds by Poulenc, performed by members of the orchestra. (March 18 at 2.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "TECH AND TECHNO"
Todd Reynolds, the illustrious classical-jazz violinist who recently departed from the avant-garde string quartet Ethel, will be the front man for Neil Rolnick's "iFiddle Concerto," one of four world-première works conducted by Steven Sloane. The evening concludes with the New York première of "Omnivorous Furniture," by Mason Bates, the up-and-coming composer-d.j. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 17 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
Ian Bostridge, in residence at Carnegie Hall for his series of "Perspectives" concerts, appears with the ensemble to sing works both familiar (a set of Handel arias) and exotic (Lutoslawski's lapidary "Paroles Tissées"). Donald Runnicles conducts the program, which also includes Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. (212-247-7800. March 19 at 2.)

ESTONIAN PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER CHOIR
The Baltic region is legendary for its choral groups, and this one, conducted by the British vocal guru Paul Hillier, is among the best. The New York première of Arvo Pärt's "Anthem of St. John the Baptist" is the highlight of a concert that also features six more Pärt pieces and excerpts from Rachmaninoff's "All-Night Vigil." The organist Christopher Bowers-Broadbent accompanies them. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-721-6500. March 19 at 4.)

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
In the first of two concerts, Kurt Masur comes back to Avery Fisher Hall to lead his excellent new orchestra in Beethoven's Violin Concerto, the work with which he closed his tenure at the New York Philharmonic (and with the same violinist, Anne-Sophie Mutter), and Dvořák's Symphony No. 8. (212-721-6500. March 20 at 8.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
March 15 at 7:30: The Orion String Quartet, joined by the violist Hsin-Yun Huang and the cellist Clancy Newman, performs music by Schulhoff, Mendelssohn (the impassioned final String Quartet in F Minor), and Zwilich. ♦ March 17 at 8 and March 19 at 5: Edgar Meyer, the bassist and composer whose music falls somewhere in the space between minimalism and bluegrass, performs in a program that includes two of his own works as well as pieces by Bach, Rossini, and Kodály. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

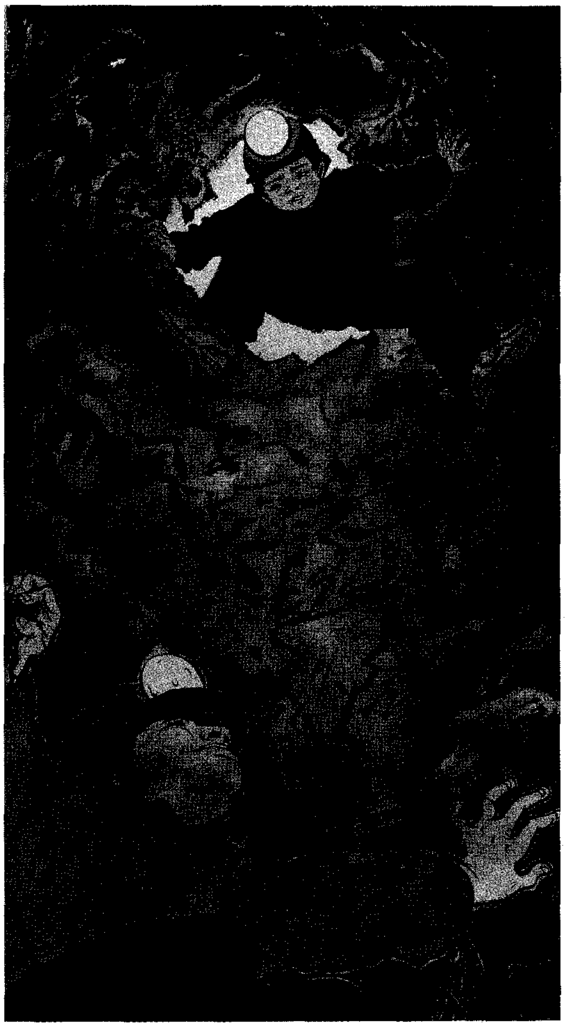
JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET
The fleet French pianist is at his best in such sparkling works as Schumann's "Symphonic Études" and Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit," two highlights of his upcoming Carnegie Hall program. (212-247-7800. March 15 at 8.)

ALEXANDER LONQUICH
March 15 at 8: The German pianist, an ECM recording artist, makes his U.S. recital début at the 92nd Street Y with music by Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, and Wolfgang Rihm (a New York première). ♦ March 18 at 8: Lonquich returns to join the Tokyo String Quartet in an all-Mozart program. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

BARGEMUSIC
Mark O'Connor, the charismatic folk-classical fiddler and composer, is the lead act at the floating chamber-music series this week, the first of three concerts he will give around New York in the coming days. The pianist Soyeon Lee and the cellist Soo Bae, O'Connor's colleagues in the new Edgeffect Ensemble, offer his "Fiddle Sonata" and two trios. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. March 16-17 at 7:30. 718-624-2083.)

JORDI SAVALL AND HESPÈRION XXI
As the capstone of a two-day residency at the Metropolitan Museum, the popular Catalonian gamba player—along with his wife, the soprano Montserrat Figueras, and members of his ensemble—performs *folias, romanescas,* and *pasacalles* by such composers as Hidalgo, Sanz, and Ortiz, in the intimate setting of the Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. March 16 at 8. For more information, see www.metmuseum.org.)

STEPHANIE BLYTHE AND JOHN RELYEA
The estimable Warren Jones accompanies the two Metropolitan Opera stars in songs and duets by Thomas, Rossini, Tchaikovsky, and Strauss at the Temple of Dendur. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. March 17 at 8.)



"The Devil's Miner," a documentary, opens March 17.

"WALL TO WALL STRAVINSKY"
Symphony Space pays tribute to the iconic twentieth-century composer in a daylong marathon that features performances by such musicians as Marni Nixon, Lucy Shelton, Kevin Burdette, Don Byron, and Charles Neidich. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 18 at 11 A.M. For full schedule, see www.symphonyspace.org.)

THOMAS QUASTHOFF
Justus Zeyen accompanies the extraordinary baritone in Schubert's "Die Schöne Müllerin." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 18 at 8.)

FIREWORKS: "PYROTECHNICS"
"Hout" ("Wood"), Louis Andriessen's neo-minimalist masterpiece, is the highlight of a rock-style concert from the young new-music ensemble that also features works by such downtown stalwarts as Lois V. Vierk and Nick Didkovsky. (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. March 18 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MATT HAIMOVITZ: "GOULASH"
The vibrant cult cellist, who went off the classical grid years ago to play in alternative venues, comes to the Knitting Factory for three gigs this spring. In the first, he appears with DJ Olive and the ensemble Constantinople in arrangements and improvisations based on works by Bartók and Led Zeppelin. (74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 212-219-3132. March 19 at 8.)

ZANKEL HALL RECITALS
March 19 at 7:30: The pianist Richard Goode's wide-ranging recital, centered on Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960, and several songs), also features a performance of Janáček's dramatic song cycle "The Diary of One Who Disappeared." The tenor Matthew Polenzani and the mezzo-soprano Tamara Mumford are his guests. ♦ March 20 at 7:30: The exciting and insightful young pianist Lars Vogt offers sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven (No. 32 in C Minor), and a work by his wife, Tatyana Komarova. (212-247-7800.)

MOVIES OPENING

BEAUTIFUL CITY
Asghar Farhadi directed this Iranian drama, about a murderer whose victim's family must pay blood money for his execution. In Farsi. Opening March 15. (Film Forum.)

BEYOND HONOR
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 17. (Village East Cinemas.)

THE DEVIL'S MINER
A documentary, directed by Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani, about two adolescent boys who work in a Bolivian silver mine. Opening March 17. (Cinema Village.)

DON'T COME KNOCKING
Sam Shepard and Jessica Lange star in this drama, directed by Wim Wenders, about an aging actor who searches for his long-lost child. Opening March 17. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

DON'T TELL
A drama, directed by Cristina Comencini, about a woman driven by nightmares to flee Rome for America. In Italian. Opening March 17. (Sunshine Cinema.)

DON'T TRIP . . . HE AIN'T THROUGH WITH ME YET
A performance at an Atlanta arena by Steve Harvey, one of the Original Kings of Comedy. Opening March 17. (In wide release.)

FIND ME GUILTY
Sidney Lumet directed this comedy-drama, about the trial of a mobster (Vin Diesel). Opening March 17. (In wide release.)

MIRAGE
Svetozar Ristovski directed this drama, about a young boy in Macedonia who is torn between poetry and violence. In Macedonian and Albanian. Opening March 17. (Quad Cinema.)

SHE'S THE MAN
Amanda Bynes stars in this modernization of "Twelfth Night," directed by Andy Fickman. Opening March 17. (In wide release.)

TAKE MY EYES
Reviewed below in Now Playing. In Spanish. Opening March 17. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

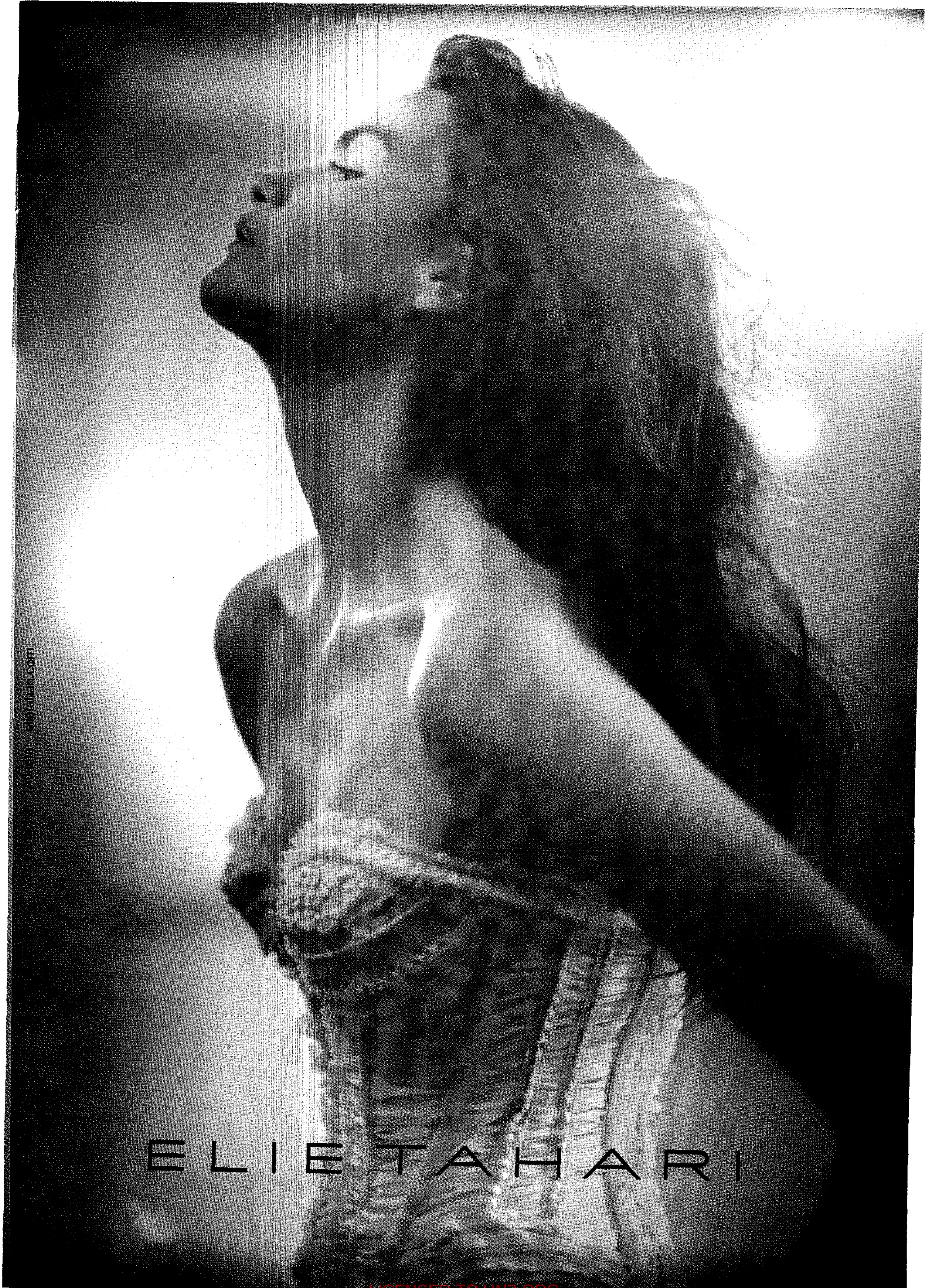
THANK YOU FOR SMOKING
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 17. (In wide release.)

V FOR VENDETTA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 17. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

ASK THE DUST
Robert Towne spent thirty years chasing the chance to film John Fante's cult-classic quasi-autobiographical 1939 novel about Arturo Bandini, a hardscrab-

YUKO SHIMIZU


ELIE TAHARI
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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DAMSELS IN DISTRESS

"Innocence," released last year, is a new addition to a slim subdivision of cinema: the Creepiness of Female Education. The list is headed by "Picnic at Hanging Rock" and "The Beguiled," and, like them, Lucile Hadzihalilović's film (at Florence Gould Hall on March 21) depends on an absolute equation between the virginal whiteness of the school uniform and the dark-toned menace of the surrounding atmosphere. The setting, in this case, is an establishment for young French girls, immured behind ivy-smothered walls; there are just two regular teachers, complemented by aging serving maids who are said to be former pupils kept there because they tried to escape. The camera dwells and gazes like a stalker, and the vision of prepubescence is so unabashed that, were the director a man, it might have provoked more than the passing discomfort of the audience. Still, there is no doubting Hadzihalilović's ability to lure us toward allegorical readings: Are we really watching early lives, or could they be afterlives? Why does every new girl arrive in a casket? Are all French kids taught like this?

—*Anthony Lane*

ble young writer who lives in a seedy Los Angeles hotel, and Camilla Lopez, the fierce Mexican waitress with whom he shares lust and rage. It wasn't worth the wait. He got Colin Farrell to pretend to be a writer, reconstructed nineteen-thirties L.A. on a back lot in South Africa, and patched the soundtrack with freeze-dried snippets of Fante's book. Farrell does not burn with Bandini's tormented conflict between virtue and desire (or with anything at all), Towne dilutes beyond recognition the self-righteous nastiness that is Fante's true charm, and Salma Hayek, undirected as Camilla, is merely the object of the director's late-autumn fantasies. The first shot of her is a side view from shoulder to waist, and things go downhill from there.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

BEYOND HONOR

Depending on one's viewpoint, either an extraordinarily effective piece of agitprop or the "Reefer Madness" of Islamic fundamentalism. Sahira (Ruth Osuna), an Egyptian-American medical student in California, is constrained by her tyrannical father, Mohammed (Wadie Andrawis), to practice a faith that she does not share and to follow repressive social codes that she rejects. When she falls in love with a non-Muslim colleague, her father and her tormented, sexually confused younger brother, Samir (Ryan Izay), take shocking revenge in the name of family honor. The writer and director, Varun Khanna, daringly presents the sexual violence and abuse that he thinks are lurking behind patriarchal law, and asserts, through an unambiguously partisan script and spare, didactic images, that unyieldingly traditional Islam poses a threat to freedom in general and to women in particular. Politics aside, Sahira is the film's emotional center, and she is fiercely incarnated by Osuna, a brave and inspired actress, a flesh-and-blood woman grafted onto a stark cartoon. In English and Arabic.—*R.B.* (Village East Cinemas.)

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

In the summer of 1963, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) herd the sheep on Brokeback Mountain, in Wyoming, and fall in love. Ang Lee's movie traces the ups and downs of that love over many years, making it clear that the downs are fated to outnumber the ups. The film has a curious motion to begin with, managing to seem at once hectic and sluggish; once the heroes start to grow up, however, and thus to struggle against their feelings, the story comes painfully alive, and the performances stretch toward the tragic. The picture belongs to Ledger, whose downcast gaze and chewed-up words bear almost unbearable testimony to a heart under siege. Any attempt to promote this as an issue movie, gripped by an agenda, feels badly misplaced; the only issue here is the oldest and most sorrowful one of all.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/12/05.) (In wide release.)

CAPOTE

How could Truman Capote, with his high, thin, goose-quill voice and his floating palms, possibly have gained the trust of the straightforward men and women of Holcomb, Kansas, when he went there for this magazine in 1959 to investigate the pointless slaughter of four members of the Clutter family—the murders that became the subject of Capote's masterpiece, "In Cold Blood"? The writer Dan Futterman and the director Bennett Miller tell us how, and the wonderful Philip Seymour Hoffman first captures Capote physically and then works inward to the vulnerable yet rotting soul. This is easily the most intelligent and detailed film ever made about a writer's working method and character.—*David Denby* (10/10/05) (In wide release.)

CRASH

A brazenly alive and heartbreaking film about the rage and foolishness of intolerance—the mutual abrasions of white, black, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Asian citizens in the great and strange city of Los Angeles. The movie starts off with separate vignettes in which the characters run afoul of each other, say things better left unsaid, and get into terrible trouble. Later, they cross paths again, sometimes in bizarre coincidences that feel exactly right; some of these scenes play out at the edge of insanity, where contentiousness spills over into tragedy or farce. The furiously candid screenplay was written by Paul Haggis and Robert Moresco, and the picture was directed by Haggis, who, in his first time out as director, demonstrates an amazing skill with actors.—*D.D.* (10/10/05) (In wide release.)

THE HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS

Asia Argento directed, and stars in, this adaptation of J. T. LeRoy's book of the same name. The seven-year-old hero, Jeremiah (Jimmy Bennett), has been brought from a loving foster home to the half-empty apartment of his mother, Sarah (Argento), who takes drugs and turns tricks for a living. The rest of the film is a dutiful course in degradation, complete with a roster of villains as well established as those of any soap opera. As an actress, Argento has not advanced to a significant degree since her ballsy turn opposite Vin Diesel in "XXX." As a director, she has a tendency to play leapfrog with the narrative at the exact moment when it threatens to hold our interest. This is a shame, because when Argento does stop to consider the changes that humans slowly wreak on one another, as opposed to the sudden blows that they inflict, she can reach beyond the gross to a damaged sadness that many filmmakers would prefer not to ponder.—*A.L.* (3/13/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

HELL IS FOR HEROES

Don Siegel, who thought that Steve McQueen had "the strongest eyes in the world," elicited the star's most feral performance in this small-scale but scary Second World War drama. McQueen plays an almost psychotic loner in a squad pinned down in front of a German pillbox. Siegel has the directorial acumen to unify a cast composed of up-and-comers, veterans, and pop personalities, including Fess Parker, James Coburn, Harry Guardino, Mike Kellin, Nick Adams, Bobby Darin, and Bob Newhart; he even works in a variation on Newhart's comedy-act phone shtick without disrupting the melodramatic flow. And the movie never goes soft: McQueen's ultimate self-sacrifice is riddled with guilt and bitterness.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 21.)

I SAW BEN BARKA GET KILLED

France's great political scandal of 1965-66 centered on the disappearance from Paris of Mehdi Ben Barka, an Algerian opposition leader in exile and an international left-wing Third World activist. The director Serge Le Péron's docudrama about the bizarre events—neither Ben Barka nor his corpse has ever been found—retains their hallucinatory air of implausibility. Ben Barka had come to Paris on the pretext of making a film about decolonization with the great French director Georges Franju (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and the writer Marguerite Duras (Josiane Balasko). The project had been organized by Georges Figon (Charles Berling), a Dostoyevskian petty criminal and littérateur, who himself had been recruited by local gangsters brought into the game through the French secret services, working with Moroccan authorities in conjunction with the C.I.A. Le Péron does not presume to unpack all of the boxes within boxes, but his inspired casting gives the film a searing historical resonance: Léaud's tormented confusion bears the weight of an industry and a nation burdened with more than one political delusion.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; March 17. Walter Reade Theatre; March 16 and March 19.)

MADEA'S FAMILY REUNION

Big mama Madea returns in the playwright Tyler Perry's scattershot cultural happening. Perry, in drag, plays the sassy Southern matriarch with broad comedic strokes, and, although the result is sometimes like watching Oprah Winfrey in a Three Stooges routine, his character taps into a maternal wisdom that is both familiar and comforting. But the film's sloppy mixture of melodrama and ribald humor borders on the incoherent, and the well-intentioned sermonizing (Maya Angelou and Cicely Tyson dispense bromides) is so willfully earnest that the film teeters into a polemic on responsibility rather than extolling the good-natured love of family that Perry clearly sees as true salvation.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

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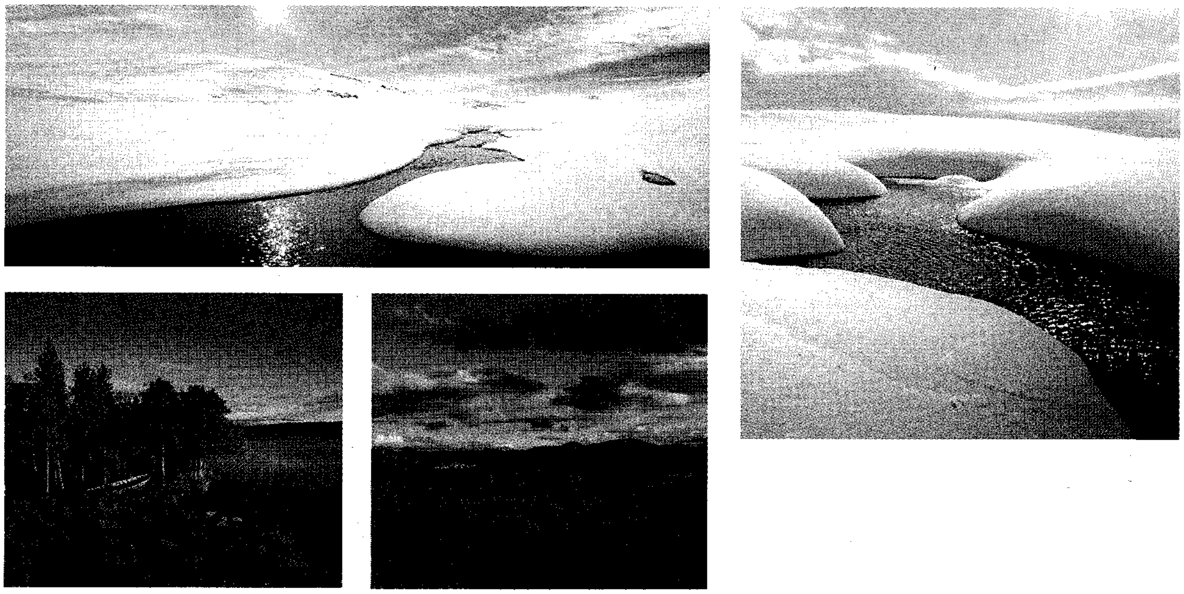

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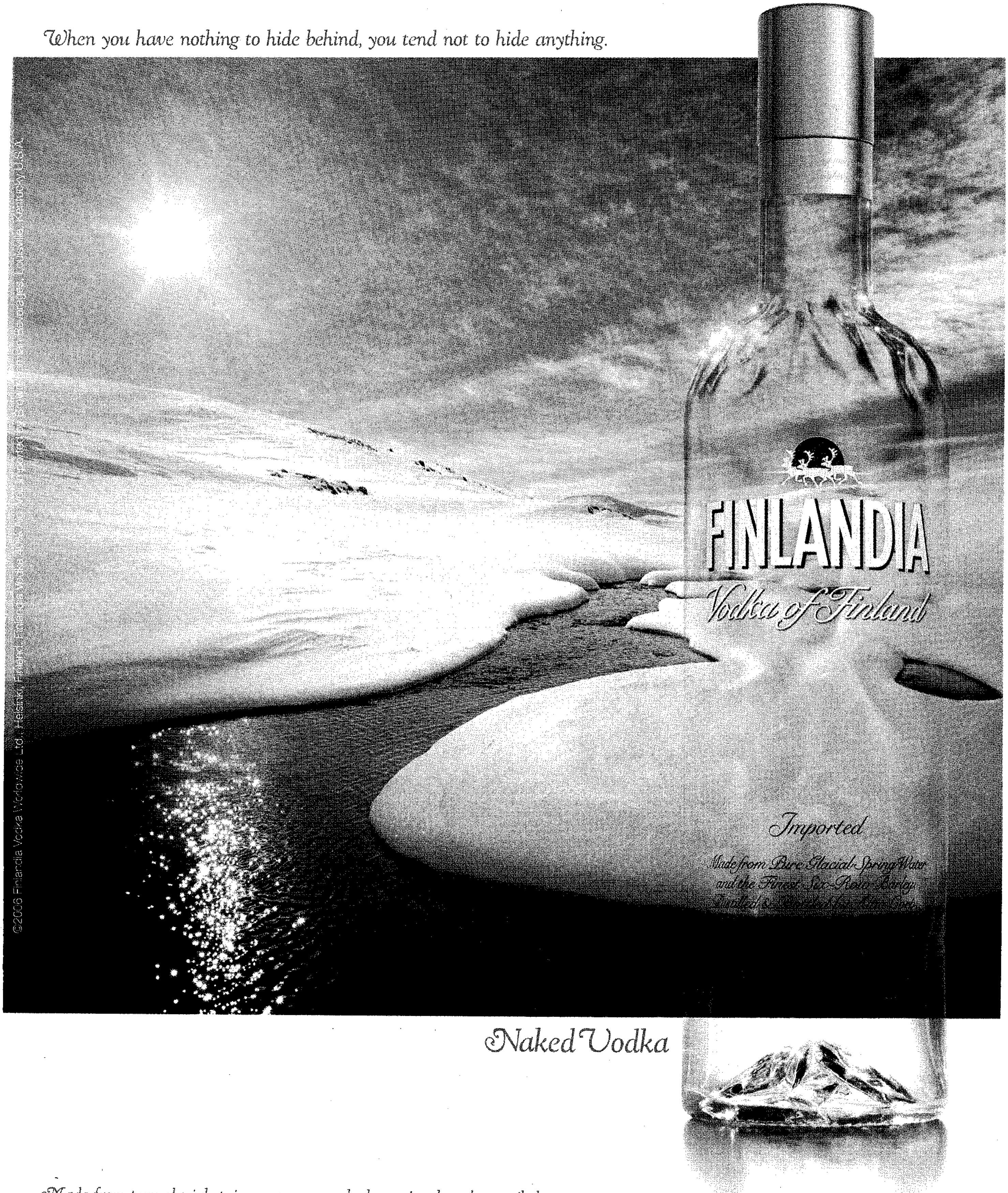
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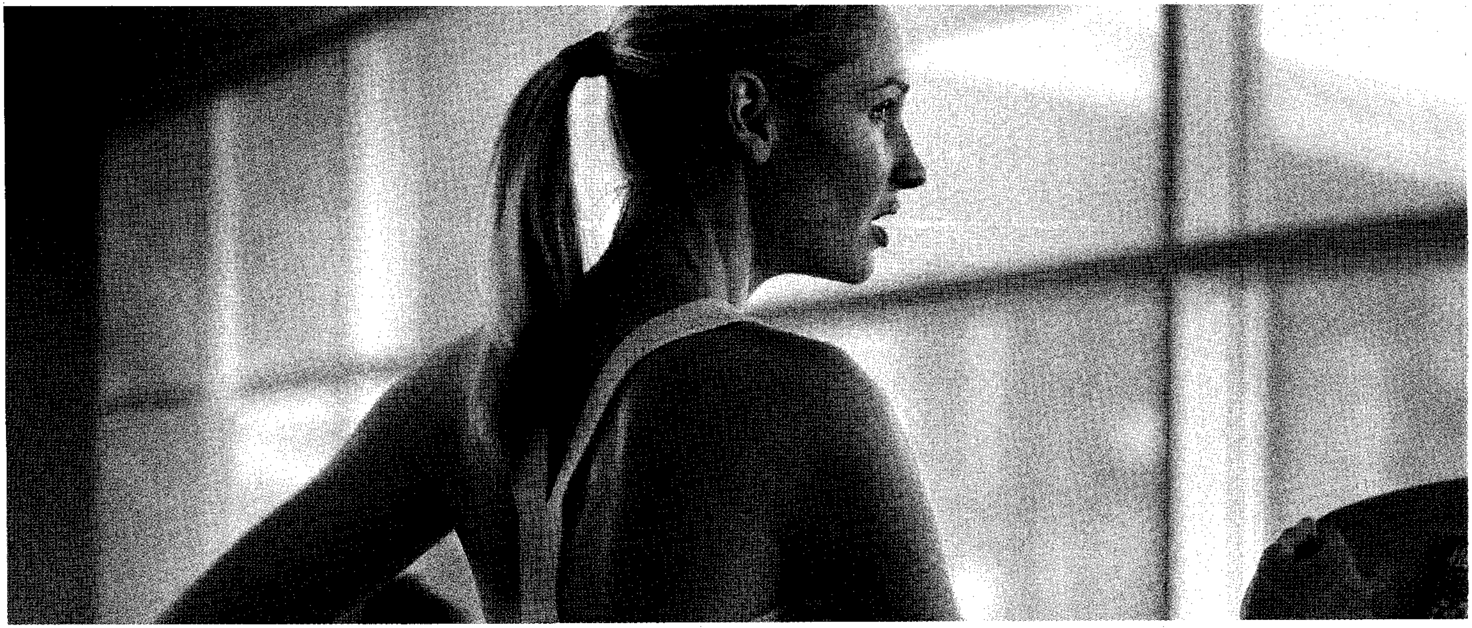
NIGHT WATCH
The first part of a trilogy by the Russian director Timur Bekmambetov. Any attempt to summarize the plot is liable to result in complete mental collapse; suffice it to say that it is set largely in modern-day Moscow, that it revolves around the small matter of a global feud between darkness and light, and that the list of characters includes blood drinkers and clairvoyants, plus a well-behaved owl that, much to its own surprise, turns into a naked woman. Some viewers have chided Bekmambetov for trying too hard to emulate the pacing and blowsy special effects of the American blockbuster, but there is a grimy fascination in seeing those methods applied (at a fraction of the cost) to an unfamiliar setting, rife with desperation and decay. In Russian, with artfully worked subtitles.—*A.L.* (2/27/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE PINK PANTHER
In a year when Hollywood seems like one big biographical wax museum, Steve Martin does not play Inspector Clouseau—rather, he plays Peter Sellers playing the role. The original Clouseau is not, in any case, a character but a collection of brilliant routines by the late English genius, and Steve Martin bravely does those numbers with as great a comic nimbleness as could be wished. What has changed is the context: the antic franchise that started in 1963 was a sendup of Continental sophistication (and not a good one, at that); now that setup has become a kids' film. Martin, who co-wrote the script, gives himself every chance to ham it up, and does so with generous good humor, but the director, Shawn Levy, is at best an observer of his show and at worst an intruder in it, and though Jean Reno is adroit and human as Clouseau's sidekick, political correctness has robbed the gags of their bite. For children with no comparative reference, an innocent pleasure; adults in the know may admire Martin's doomed audacity.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

PLATFORM
In 1979, with Maoism still reigning in China, a state-sponsored troupe of young musicians and dancers travels through the countryside to present shows of patriotic songs and skits. Two young couples—the ironic, introverted Cui Mingliang (Wang Honwei) and the practical-minded young danseuse Yin Ruijuan (Zhao Tao) and their best friends, Zhang Jun (Liang Jingdong) and Zhong Ping (Yang Tianji)—seem to be made for each other, but Ruijuan's policeman father despises the freethinking Mingliang, and Ping and Jun are arrested for premarital cohabitation. Then, in the nineteen-eighties, against a background of loudspeaker propaganda and summary public executions, something seems to happen: privatization is the new credo, patriotic shows yield to pop songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the troupe changes its name to the All-Star Rock 'n' Breakdance Electronic Band. The director, Jia Zhangke, presents a startlingly precise definition of globalization—a rapid industrialization in which mass culture does not develop locally but is suddenly imported—and he shows its effect. The mock-epic story ends in 1990, but nothing really has happened: inner lives are stunted, inert passivity prevails, and, Jia suggests, the decade of tumultuous change in China was merely a convulsive emptiness. In Mandarin. Released in 2000.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 17 and 19.)

SOPHIE SCHOLL: THE FINAL DAYS
A careful rendering of a monstrous case. As the title suggests, we follow the last act in the life of Sophie Scholl (Julia Jentsch), who, with her brother Hans (Fabian Hinrichs) and a friend, Christoph Probst (Florian Stetter), was arrested in 1943 on a charge of treason. Their crime was distributing leaflets at Munich University that protested against Nazi rule and an unwinnable war; the punishment was death. Marc Rothemund's film is unadorned and verges on the dull, but behind the plodding procedures of the law you sense the beat of terror, and the effect is to quicken even the most fleeting actions with an emotional charge. The heart of the film is Sophie's three-day interrogation at the hands of Robert Mohr (Alexander Held); although no violence is done, you become gripped by the sight of a dead soul hounding a living one and being outsmarted by her unbreakable goodness. The subsequent trial is a travesty, worsened by one's knowledge that the judge (André Hennicke) really was as maddened and ranting as depicted here. The finale is as quick as it is awful, and not for the faint of heart. In German.—*A.L.* (2/27/06) (Film Forum.)

SYRIANA
Stephen Gaghan's tense, outrageously complicated thriller—a major film but not a great one—is about oil, a corrupted C.I.A. that strong-arms for the oil companies, and the politics of the Middle East. The principal players are a large Houston-based oil concern and its Washington law firm; an emirate in the Gulf; an aging C.I.A. field operative (George Clooney); an industry analyst (Matt Damon) based in Europe; a couple of Pakistani oil workers who lose their jobs and wind up in a madrassa; and assorted terrorists, cynical bureaucrats, and bullying legal and corporate types. There is no real protagonist—or, rather, the protagonist is the oil business itself, which gets people killed, tortured, blown up, thrown on the junk heap. Gaghan constructs short, bristling scenes that often end abruptly with nasty implications hanging in the air. He hops all over the globe, and his method makes it impossible to develop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anything in depth (you really have to see this movie twice in order to fully see it once), but he has a sharp tongue, moral urgency, and an amazingly fluent way with actors.—*D.D.* (12/05/05) (In wide release.)

TAKE MY EYES

In this earnest Spanish drama, directed by Icíar Bollaín, Pilar (Laia Marull), a victimized woman, struggles to regain her self-respect and to break free from Antonio, her abusive husband (Luis Tosar). Antonio—who truly loves her—makes a real effort to change, but he is too frustrated with life and too emotionally stunted to succeed. Spain has lately been coming to terms with domestic violence, until recently a taboo subject, and this film, with its scenes of group therapy and traditional forms of denial (Pilar's mother insists that she return to the husband who beats and terrorizes her), is a step in the process. This is a good thing, and the brutality and humiliation that the movie shows seem very real, but, in the end, the film's artlessness gives it the feel of a tragic case study. In Spanish.—*Marina Harss* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), the chief spokesman for the tobacco lobby in Washington, is handsome and likable, a mixture of swagger and impudent candor. Nick knows that his arguments in favor of smoking are rubbish, but he enjoys the game of spin too much to give it up. This shrewdly entertaining satirical comedy, adapted by Jason Reitman (son of the veteran director Ivan Reitman) from Christopher Buckley's 1994 novel, loves the brazen moxie of "sin" lobbyists without being fooled by them. The comic highlight of the movie is the regular lunch sessions that Nick holds with the lobbyists for the alcohol and firearms industries (Maria Bello and David Koechner)—the three of them, boasting of the lethality of their respective clients, might be doing a recurring skit on "Saturday Night Live." When Nick gets written up by a seductive reporter (Katie Holmes) from the Washington *Probe*, his life goes into a tailspin. With Cameron Bright as Nick's adoring son, J. K. Simmons and Robert Duvall as tobacco executives, Rob Lowe and Adam Brody as glib Hollywood types, and William H. Macy as a sanctimonious anti-smoking senator from Vermont who has a collection of maple-syrup bottles in his office. Jason Reitman's direction is fast-moving and witty; the movie is a winner.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

TSOTSI

In Gavin Hood's South African drama, the nonactor Presley Chweneyagae plays Tsotsi, a hooded, toughened gang leader in a Johannesburg shantytown who kills for money and beats his friend for challenging his dignity. When Tsotsi shoots a woman for her car and finds that he has unwittingly absconded with her baby, he is struck with a dilemma: what to do with the baby? This would be interesting if Tsotsi's choice were not immediately clear. In a film depicting a seemingly lawless society, where women are decent and men are helpless or derelict without them, Tsotsi's painful attempts to care for an infant seem not revelatory but calculated. Curiously styled, with rap-video camera moves giving way to sensitive closeups, this reductive story of redemption milks the sentimentality, rather than the profundity, born of an extreme change of heart. In Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

UNKNOWN WHITE MALE

Rupert Murray's modest documentary explores a fascinating subject: his friend Doug Bruce, a former highly successful Wall Street broker, who woke up one day on the subway to Coney Island with no knowledge of who he was. Doctors surmise that Doug lost his episodic (autobiographical) memory but retained his semantic (ideas and concepts) and procedural (skills and know-how) memory; the cause remains elusive. Home-video footage shows an acerbic, emotionally limited young rogue; the new Doug is a docile naïf blown away by his "first" glimpse of the ocean and visit to the Met. Speculation that he is faking it is abated with one look at his post-amnesiac face: when Doug meets his family and old friends for the first time, he stares at them like a stunned dog and lets himself be hugged and cajoled as he learns what it's like to be Doug.—*S.L.* (Village East Cinemas.)

WALK THE LINE

Joaquin Phoenix, with deep-set blue eyes, a long chin, and a scarred lip, is Johnny Cash; Reese Witherspoon, bouncy and smart, with long black tresses, is his beloved June Carter, of the country-singing Carter clan. Phoenix slings his guitar around and guns it at the audience in Cash's shambling style; his singing wavers in pitch, but, all in all, it's not bad. This bio-pic, covering Cash's youth and early manhood, written by James Mangold and Gill Dennis and directed by Mangold, is very pleasant but too conventionally conceived. Phoenix looks at times as if he wanted to kill someone, but the filmmakers haven't written anything interesting for him to say, and most of the time Cash comes off as furtive, weak, and lost. As June stares directly at Cash's weaknesses and nails him every time, "Walk the Line" becomes a kind of moralizing romantic comedy, in which he struggles to be a man worthy of her love and she struggles against her desire to have him.—*D.D.* (11/21/05) (In wide release.)

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WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN
Two longtime friends, Munho (Yoo Jitae), a college lecturer in art, and Hunjoon (Kim Taewoo), a struggling filmmaker, are bound by a mutual weakness for Sunhwa (Sung Hyunah); Hunjoon used to go out with her, and when he left for a trip to the United States Munho stepped in. Now, with Hunjoon back in South Korea and Munho safely married, they track her down once more. The director, Hong Sangsoo, shuffles the time scheme, leaving us gasping to keep up, and the performances, in their flat placidity, give little away. The film is doomed to infuriate, and its scrutiny of disconnected beings, filmed in long, hold-your-breath takes, might feel like old hat to anyone reared on Antonioni, yet Hong has a grace and stealth of his own, and his scenes tend to tilt in directions that few would dare to predict. In Korean.—*A.L.* (Cinema Village.)

Also Playing

FAILURE TO LAUNCH: In wide release. **RUNNING SCARED:** In wide release. **THE SHAGGY DOG:** In wide release. **16 BLOCKS:** In wide release. **THE SQUID AND THE WHALE:** In wide release (10/24/05).

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—“NewFilmmakers.” March 15 at 7: “Stripped” (2002, Jill Morley) and a short film. ♦ March 15 at 8:30: “CineKink Shorts.” ♦ The films of Alexander Kluge. All films are in German. March 15 at 7 and March 18 at 4:30: A short-film program. ♦ March 15 at 9:15 and March 18 at 7: “Yesterday Girl” (1966). ♦ March 16 and March 19 at 7: “The Middle of the Road Is a Very Dead End” (1974). ♦ “Artists Under the Big Top: Perplexed” (1968). ♦ March 17 at 7 and March 19 at 9: “The Patriot” (1979). ♦ March 17 at 9:30 and March 20 at 7:30: “The Power of Emotion” (1983). ♦ March 18 at 9 and March 21 at 7:30: “The Blind Director” (1985). ♦ The films of Jia Zhangke. All films are in Mandarin. March 16 at 7:30 and March 18 at 3:45: “The Pickpocket” (1997). ♦ March 16 at 9:45 and March 18 at 3:45: “Unknown Pleasures” (2002). ♦ March 17 and March 19 at 8: “Platform” (†). ♦ March 18 at 8:30 and March 19 at 5: “The World” (2004).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—“Cinema Tropical.” March 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Al Otro Lado” (2005, Natalia Almada; in Spanish) and “Mataparajos” (2005, Kyzza Terrazas; in Spanish). ♦ “Some Kind of Horror Show.” March 16 at 7: “Innocent Blood” (1992, John Landis) and “Thriller” (1983, Landis). ♦ March 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Mark of the Vampire” (1935, Tod Browning) and “Intimate Interviews: Bela Lugosi” (1932). ♦ March 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “The Witches” (1990, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ The films of Hiroshi Teshigahara. March 17-19 at 3, 6, and 9: “A Woman in the Dunes” (1964; in Japanese).

DONNELL LIBRARY CENTER
20 W. 53rd St. (212-621-0609)—“The Vitaphone Project.” March 15 at 2:30: Ten short recently restored early sound films featuring vaudeville performers, including Eddie Cantor and the Nicholas Brothers (1927-29).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. March 15-16 at 1:30, 4, 7, and 9:30: “Blue Velvet” (1986, David Lynch). ♦ Through April 13: The films of Don Siegel. March 17-19 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: “Charley Varrick” (1973). ♦ March 20 at 1:50, 5:30, and 9:10: “The Big Steal” (1949). ♦ March 20 at 3:20 and 7: “The Verdict” (1946). ♦ March 21 at 1:30, 5:10, and 8:45: “Hell Is for Heroes” (†). ♦ March 21 at 3:20, 7, and 10:25: “Crime in the Streets” (1956).

DVD NOTES
THE RHYTHM METHOD

“**The Busby Berkeley Collection**” (Warner Bros.) is a sublime misnomer. Berkeley directed only the musical production numbers (such as “42nd Street” and “Lullaby of Broadway”) in four of the five lively Depression-era backstage melodramas and comedies here (“42nd Street,” “Gold Diggers of 1933,” “Footlight Parade,” “Dames,” and “Gold Diggers of 1935”). But those musical numbers are the masterworks that make those films, and this boxed set, so important.

Few directors’ names are as instantly identifiable with a visual style as Berkeley’s—the rhythmic display of massed bodies in geometric forms filmed from overhead—yet that style was inseparable from its surprisingly deep substance. In his dances, music is the metronome for biological forces: he shows the personal dramas of romance to be the front for mighty, impersonal energies. Abstraction allowed Berkeley to express the inexpressible, which, in his case—given Hollywood’s censorious Hays Code—was an audacious set of symbolic variations on the comical drama of a species obsessed with sex and death. In his short musical interludes, the cinematic precursors to music videos, he finds odd and striking ways to represent them. One of the first of these routines, “Shuffle Off to Buffalo,” from 1933, is set aboard a honeymoon train and ends with the deflowering of a woman as she dangles and releases her shoes through a compartment curtain.

The sexual allusions in Berkeley’s choreography are startling even today. He transformed the costumed bodies and shining faces of his chorus girls into suggestively biomorphic shapes: slits that open and close, undulating canals, and expanding and contracting holes. He frequently organized his dancing girls into enormous V-shaped phalanxes, one of which, in “Don’t Say Goodnight,” from “Wonder Bar,” is besieged by huge moving pillars. “By a Waterfall,” from “Footlight Parade,” suggests a fertility rite, as water nymphs stand with their legs spread on wedding-cake-like turntables while jets of water spurt around them.

The box at hand—which offers a fascinating bonus disk of the Berkeley productions from these and other classic movies—makes plain Berkeley’s single-handed resuscitation of the Hollywood musical and his infusion of the genre with unexpected conceptual power. And with sex.

—*Richard Brody*

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—“CinémaTuesdays.” March 21 at 12:30, 4, and 7: “Innocence” (2004, Lucile Hadzihalilovic; in French). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—“Rendez-Vous with French Cinema.” All films are in French. Most screenings are introduced by the director. For further information, visit www.filmlinc.com. March 15 and March 18 at 7: “You Are So Handsome” (2006, Isabelle Mergault). ♦ March 15 at 9:30: “Le Petit Lieutenant” (2005, Xavier Beauvois). ♦ March 16 at 7: “Hell” (2005, Danis Tanovic). ♦ March 16 and March 18 at 9:30: “Cold Showers” (2005, Antony Cordier). ♦ March 17 at 7 and 9:30: “I Saw Ben Barka Get Killed” (†). ♦ March 18 at 2 and 4:30: “Housewarming” (2005, Brigitte Roüan). ♦ March 19 at 2 and 7: “Zim and Company” (2005, Pierre Jolivet). ♦ March 19 at 4:30 and 9:30: “Heading South” (2005, Laurent Cantet). ♦ “Weekend Classics.” March 17-19 at noon: “Throne of Blood” (1957, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ “Waverly Midnights.” March 17-18 at midnight: “Foxy Brown” (1974, Jack Hill).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“Canadian Front 2006.” March 15 at 6:30 and March 18 at 3:30: “C.R.A.Z.Y.” (2005, Jean-Marc Vallée; in French). ♦ March 15 at 9 and March 16 at 6: “Six Figures” (2005, David Christensen). ♦ March 16 at 8:30 and March 18 at 8:30: “3 Needles” (2005, Thom Fitzgerald; in English, French, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and Mandarin). ♦ March 17 at 4:30 and March 18 at 6:30: “Unnatural and Accidental” (2006, Carl Bessai). ♦ March 17 at 6:30 and March 19 at 3: “Whole New Thing” (2005, Amnon Buchbinder). ♦ March 17 at 8:30 and March 18 at 1: “Memory for Max, Claire, Ida and Company” (2005, Allan King). ♦ March 19 at 1 and March 20 at 8:15: “Drifting States” (2005, Denis Côté; in French). ♦ March 19 at 5:15 and March 20 at 6: “My Life in Cinemascope/Bitter Memories” (2004, Denise Filiatrault; in French). ♦ The films of Joseph Jacoby. All screenings are introduced by the director. March 16 at 6 and March 19 at 3: “Shame, Shame . . . Everybody Knows Her Name” (1969). ♦ March 16 at 8 and March 19 at 1: “Hurry Up, or I’ll Be 30” (1973). ♦ March 17 at 6 and March 19 at 5: “The Great Bank Hoax” (1978). ♦ March 18 at 2 and March 20 at 6: “Davy Jones’ Locker” (1995) and short films. ♦ “Asian Cinevisions.” March 17 at 8 and March 18 at 4: “Beyond Our Ken” (2004, Pang Ho-Cheung; in Cantonese) and “Missing” (2004, Kit Hui; in Cantonese). ♦ “MediaScope 2006.” March 20 at 8: “Eyeballing” (2005, Rosalind Nashashibi), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Repertory nights. March 17 at 7:30 and March 18-19 at 6:30: “Yojimbo” (1961, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Films featuring Anna May Wong. March 18 at 1:30: “The Thief of Bagdad” (1924, Raoul Walsh; silent). ♦ March 18-19 at 4:30: “Chu Chin Chow” (1934, Walter Ford). ♦ March 19 at 2: “A Study in Scarlet” (1933, Edwin L. Marin), introduced by the filmmaker Elaine Mae Woo.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Premières. March 15 at 4:45 and 9, March 18-19 at 4:30, and March 21 at 4:30: “The Fallen” (2005, Ari Taub; in German, English, and Italian). ♦ March 15 at 7:15: “New York Doll” (2005, Greg Whiteley). ♦ March 16 at 7: “Our Modern Times,” a short-film program. ♦ March 16 at 9, March 17 at 6:30 and 9, and March 18-21 at 9: “Hate Crime” (2005, Tommy Stovall). ♦ March 17 at 11: Highlights from the Coachella Music and Arts Festival. ♦ March 18 at 11: “24 Hours on Craigslist” (2005, Michael Ferris Gibson). ♦ March 20 at 7: “One Dark and Stormy Night,” a program of short horror films. ♦ In revival. March 19 at 7: “Dr. Strangelove” (1964, Stanley Kubrick).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—“Sunshine@Midnight.” March 17-18: The unrated version of “Dead Alive” (1992, Peter Jackson).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Special screenings. March 19 at 2 and

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March 21 at 6: "The Conformist" (1970, Bernardo Bertolucci; in Italian). ♦ March 19 at 4:45 and March 21 at 8:45: "Triple Agent" (2004, Eric Rohmer; in French, Russian, and German).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. Most screenings are introduced by the director. For further information, visit www.filmlinc.com. March 15 at 1:15 and 8:45: "Cold Showers" (2005, Antony Cordier). ♦ March 15 at 3:45, March 16 at 6:15, and March 18 at 3:45: "Zim and Company" (2005, Pierre Jolivet). ♦ March 15 at 6:15: "Not Here to Be Loved" (2005, Stéphane Brizé). ♦ March 16 at 1, March 17 at 3:30, and March 18 at 9: "Grey Souls" (2005, Yves Angelo). ♦ March 16 at 3:30 and March 19 at 6:15: "I Saw Ben Barka Get Killed" (†). ♦ March 16 at 8:45 and March 19 at 3:30: "Housewarming" (2005, Brigitte Roüan). ♦ March 17 at 1 and March 18 at 6:15: "Heading South" (2005, Laurent Cantet). ♦ March 17 at 6:15, March 18 at 1, and March 19 at 9: "Le Petit Lieutenant" (2005, Xavier Beauvois). ♦ March 17 at 9 and March 19 at 1: "Hell" (2005, Danis Tanovic).

READINGS AND TALKS

MARK KURLANSKY
The author of "Salt" and "Cod" discusses his latest book, "The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell." (Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl St. 212-425-1778. March 16 at 6:30.)

MARY GAITSKILL
The novelist reads from her latest book, "Veronica." (192 Books, 192 Tenth Ave. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. March 16 at 7.)

ELIZABETH KOLBERT
The *New Yorker* writer discusses her new book about global warming, "Field Notes from a Catastrophe." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. March 16 at 7.)

"SCIENCE AND FAITH"
A panel discussion at the American Museum of Natural History brings together Kenneth Miller, a biology professor at Brown University; Robert Pollack, a biology professor and the director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion, at Columbia University; Varadaraja V. Raman, a physics and humanities professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology; and Nancey Murphy, a professor of Christian philosophy at the Fuller Theological Seminary. (Central Park W. at 79th St. 212-769-5200. March 16 at 7.)

"THEATRE OF IDEAS"
On the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, a host of academics and journalists gather to consider the state of the war. The participants include the law professor and author Noah Feldman; Victor Davis Hanson, a columnist for the *National Review Online;* Joe Klein, of *Time;* Andrew Sullivan, an editor at *The New Republic;* and Kenneth M. Pollack, a former member of the National Security Council. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 20 at 8.)

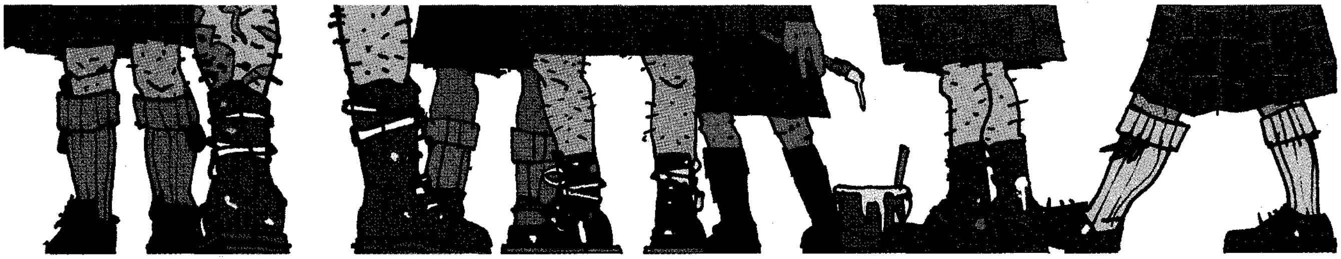
ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WINTER ECO-TOURS"
New York City Audubon is sponsoring guided boat tours of the Harbor, offering views of migratory birds that find our winters milder than what they encounter at home. "Ice isn't covering the water here," Yigal Gelb, N.Y.C.A.'s program director, points out. He reports that mergansers (ducks with a long, hooded bill) and buffleheads (small ducks with a white head) have been spotted, along with great cormorants and the occasional seal. (Saturdays through the end of the month. For more information, call 212-742-1969.)

"TORCHLIGHT TOURS"
The South Street Seaport Museum takes visitors into the preserved ruins of the Fulton Ferry Hotel, which was made famous by Joseph Mitchell's book "Up in the Old Hotel." (For more information, call 212-748-8786. March 15 at 6.)

ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE
The first New York celebration of St. Patrick's Day took place in 1766, organized by Irish soldiers keeping peace in the American colonies. The parade has grown a bit since those days. It takes over Fifth Avenue from 44th Street to 86th, drawing marching bands, bagpipe players, and, of course, politicians. (March 17, starting at 11 A.M.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Besides heroic posters, and lots of charts and checklists compiled by generations of astronauts, **Swann's** space-exploration sale on March 18 includes a series of tchotchkes and everyday objects that have experienced the thrill of space travel, including a comb, a tie tack, and a segment of heat shield encased in Lucite, from Gemini 6. On March 16, surgical manuals (complete with graphic engravings or photographs) in the house's auction of medical books remind us of the earthly horrors of war and disease. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



JEROEN KOOLHAAS

ON THE HORIZON

NIGHT LIFE
CARRYING A TOON
April 2-6

Gorillaz, the animated band led by Blur's Damon Albarn and fleshed out by the artist Jamie Hewlett, takes over the Apollo Theatre, with guest appearances by De La Soul, Ike Turner, Neneh Cherry, and other musicians. (212-307-7171.)

THE THEATRE
SLEEP TO DREAM
April 3

"The Drowsy Chaperone," a Fringe Festival transplant to Broadway, is a tongue-in-cheek sendup of the musicals of the twenties. A musical-theatre fanatic, Man in Chair, revisits his favorite numbers (which get acted out onstage), stopping the action to critique performances and interject macabre facts about the stars' real lives. Bob Martin and Sutton Foster star. (212-307-4100.)

ART
A SHOT OF SCOTCH
April 3-30

The Sixty-seventh Street galleries at Christie's auction house will host twenty paintings from the National Galleries of Scotland in honor of Tartan Week (April 1-8), a citywide celebration of all things Scotch. Among the works will be Henry Raeburn's iconic painting, "Revd Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch." (212-636-2000.)

MOVIES
VOX POPULI
April 6-26

The *Village Voice* polled film critics for their top picks of 2005, and BAM is sharing some of their more adventuresome enthusiasms in a series featuring many new films about Asia, including Tsai Ming-Liang's "The Wayward Cloud," set in the porn industry, Alexander Sokurov's "The Sun," about Hirohito in the last days of the Second World War, and two films by Andrew Bujalski. (718-636-4100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BACK TO MODERN
April 25

The violinist Midori, her years as a child prodigy long gone, is digging deeper into contemporary repertory. Her next recital features works by Kurtág, Lutoslawski, Goehr, and Weir ("Music for 247 Strings"). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

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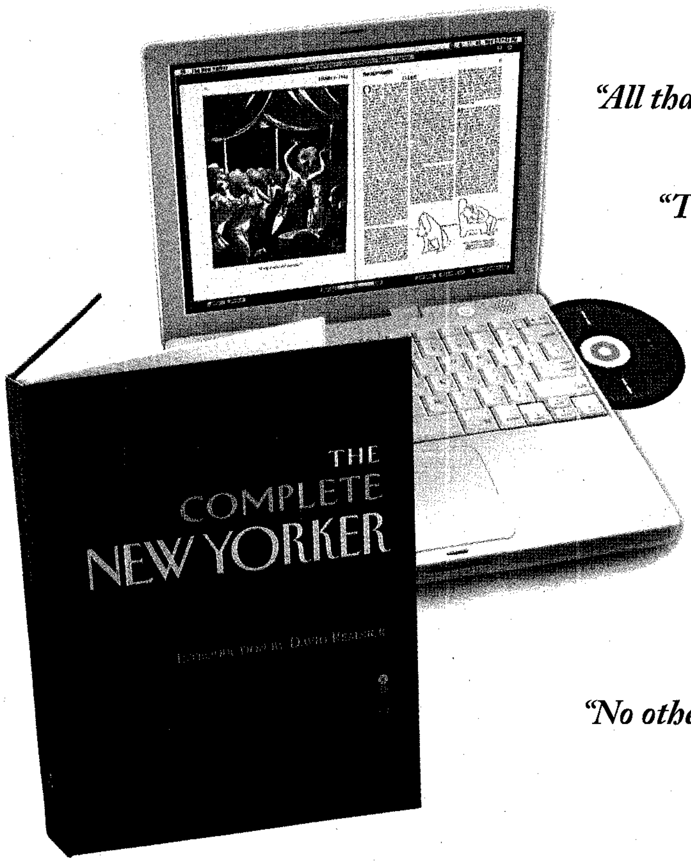

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WORLD BEAT

GOINGS ON OUT OF TOWN

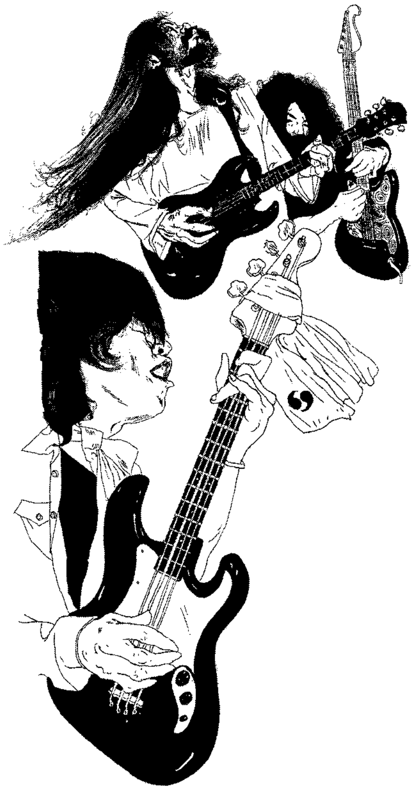
Here is a selective list of night-life events taking place between now and late spring in the United States and around the world.

NATIONAL
ATLANTA

COCA-COLA ROXY THEATRE
3110 Roswell Rd. (404-233-7699)—March 24: The New Jersey export Saves the Day combines the manic energy of punk rock with the ebullience of pop music. April 6: Ghostface Killah was one of the original members of Wu-Tang Clan, and he spun himself off from the Staten Island rap conglomerate in 1996 in high style. His solo début, "Ironman," hit No. 1 on the rap charts and No. 2 on the *Billboard* 200. Since then, he's released a series of albums, the latest of which is "Fishscale." With M1, who is half of the outspoken hip-hop group Dead Prez. April 21-22: For more than a decade, the New Orleans-based ensemble Galactic has woven modern and retro influences into a signature blend of jazz, funk, rock, and fusion. Its charismatic vocalist, Theryl (the Houseman) De Clouet, left Galactic in 2004, but the band continues to perform its extended instrumental improvisations, with the powerhouse drummer Stanton Moore anchoring an always danceable beat.

THE EARL
488 Flat Shoals Ave. SE. (404-522-3950)—March 29: Centro-Matic, a band from Denton, Texas, is led by the prolific and tireless songwriter Will Johnson. Between this outfit and his more countryesque one, South San Gabriel, he has released a dozen albums in the past decade. Centro-Matic's new disk, "Fort Recovery," has impressed some highly credentialled folks: Patterson Hood, of Drive-By Truckers, has called it his favorite album by his favorite band. April 3: Three years ago, I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness, known as ILYBICD among fans, recorded a self-titled EP with their friend Britt Daniel, of their Austin cohorts Spoon, full of dark yet poppy songs. The group's much anticipated full-length album, "Fear Is on Our Side," heads further into the shadows, to great effect. April 14: The "stoner rock" group High on Fire. April 24: Acid Mothers Temple, an eccentric psychedelic collective from Japan, boldly experiments with sprawling, spacey fare. Its expansive compositions often risk turning into bad trips, but that hasn't stopped it from developing a cult audience here.

VARIETY PLAYHOUSE
1099 Euclid Ave. (404-524-7354)—March 16: Buckethead is known for his choice of headgear (a KFC bucket) and his guitar-playing (extraordinary). March 19: The New York City group Animal Collective matches folksy harmonies and a love of melody with psychedelic experimentation. The results are both beautiful and disorienting, and have reportedly drawn the likes of David Bowie and PJ Harvey to the group's home-town shows. May 18: Mark Kozelek, the soft-spoken songwriter formerly of the impossibly delicate act Red House Painters and currently of the band Sun Kil Moon, performs solo, showcasing his quiet delivery and his taste for other musicians' material—he's covered everything from John Denver and AC/DC to Modest Mouse.



Acid Mothers Temple, in Atlanta.

ANDY FRIEDMAN

BOSTON

AGGANIS ARENA AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY
925 Commonwealth Ave. (617-353-4628)—April 12: Franz Ferdinand. According to the lead singer, Alex Kapranos, this clever post-punk band from Scotland first came together to make music for girls to dance to. Their self-titled début album, which came out two years ago, did just that, with jerky, guitar-based songs. Their latest release, "You Could Have It So Much Better," continues in a similar vein; it includes the song "Eleanor Put Your Boots On," which flirts with the front woman for the Brooklyn indie-rock group the Fiery Furnaces. Sharing the bill is Death Cab for Cutie. Named after an obscure track by the British absurdist pioneers the Bonzo Dog Band, this Seattle quartet plays an ethereal blend of indie pop, notable for its shimmering subtlety. April 29: The wildly successful hip-pop act the Black Eyed Peas strives to be commercial and conscientious at the same time. They're touring with a tricked-out Honda in tow, but it's a hybrid, not a gas-guzzler. With the Pussycat Dolls, who take sexual repression to new heights with the teasing video for their song "Beep."

AVALON
15 Lansdowne St. (617-262-2424)—March 16-19: The home-town heroes the Dropkick Murphys celebrate St. Patrick's Day. April 8: The English singer-songwriter Beth Orton may have been discovered by the techno wizard William Orbit, but she's slowly been leaving the electronica scene behind. Her 1999 album, "Central Reservation," was a gorgeous collection of honest, unadorned folk tunes, and her latest release, "Comfort of Strangers," continues her walk on the Birkenstock side. April 12: The indie rockers Clap Your Hands Say Yeah are on tour, riding a wave of Internet and critical acclaim, but the band is more than just buzz. The show was moved from the smaller Paradise Rock Club to this venue to accommodate the group's growing fan base.

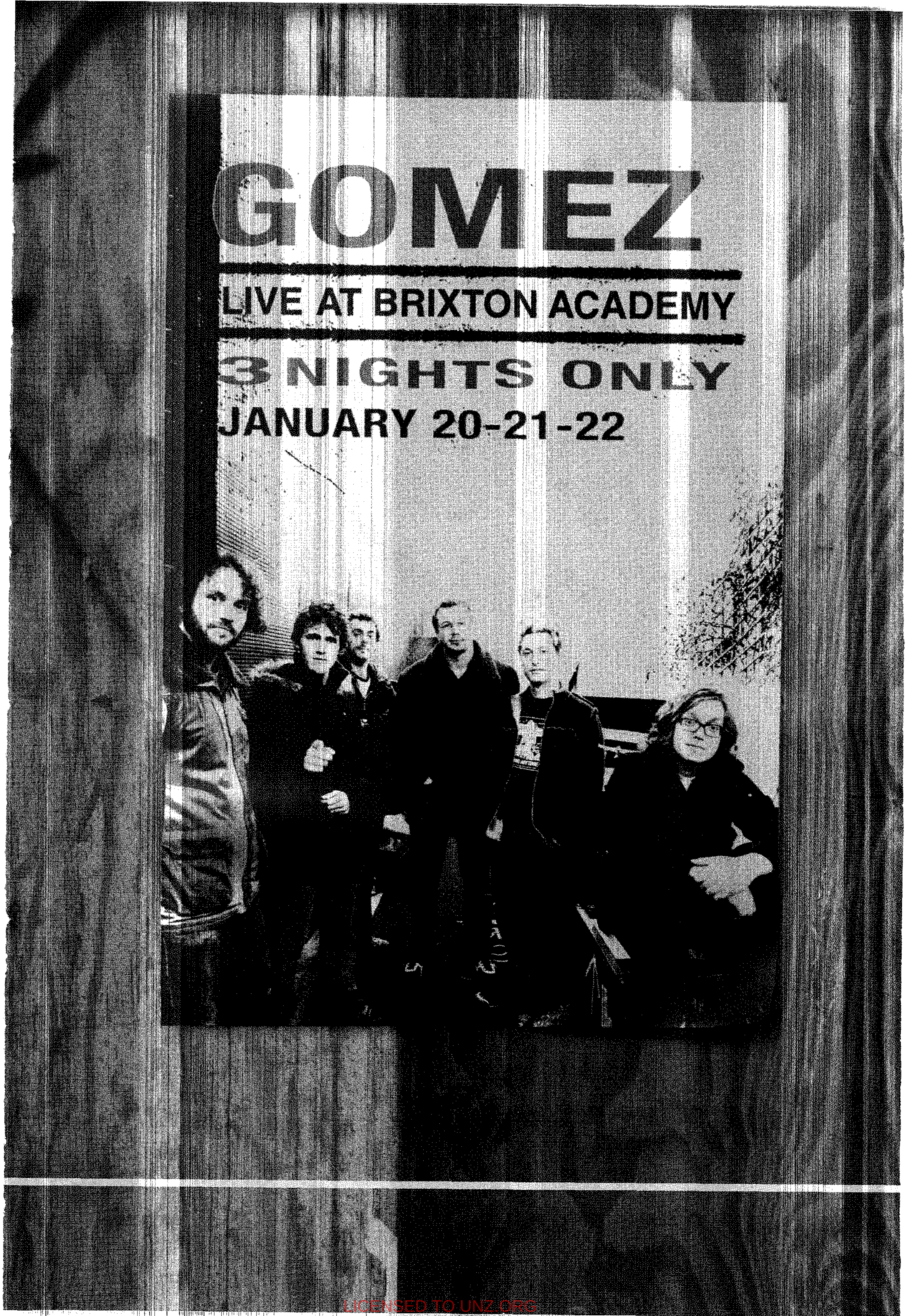
PARADISE ROCK CLUB
967 Commonwealth Ave. (617-562-8814)—March 23: The Arctic Monkeys, an unassuming-looking new English band that plays danceable post-punk rock, shocked the U.K. by giving away its music, at shows and online. They were handsomely rewarded: their release "Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not" recently became the fastest-selling début album in British history. April 21: Robert Pollard, the beer-swilling poet and former leader of Guided by Voices.

ORPHEUM THEATRE
1 Hamilton Pl. (617-679-0810)—March 31: Cesaria Evora. A breath of sweet tropical air from São Vicente (a tiny island off the coast of Senegal), Evora is known as the Barefoot Diva, a reference both to her performance style and to the earthy, laid-back feel of *morna*, the dreamy bossa-nova blues she sings with such passion. April 1: Bob Weir and Ratdog. Formed by the Grateful Dead guitarist and bassist Rob Wasserman shortly before Jerry Garcia's death, in 1995, this jam-band mainstay brings solace to graying rockers and disenfranchised hippie undergraduates. The eclectic sets are full of everything from down-home blues to classic psychedelic rock. Wasserman took a break from the group some two years ago, but Weir has kept the unit on the road. April 25: The rock juggernaut Train.

CHICAGO

DOUBLE DOOR
1572 N. Milwaukee Ave. (773-489-3160)—March 24: The National, a band composed of two sets of brothers and a friend who left their native Ohio and moved to Brooklyn, leavens its great Midwestern indie rock with a touch of East Coast angst. They're on the road with their fellow-Brooklynites the Cloud Room, who gave the world the clap-happy single "Hey Now Now." March 27: The Electric Six, another backward-looking band from the garage-rock epicenter, Detroit, set themselves apart by keeping a distinctly tongue-in-cheek approach and by peppering their music with jittery dance tempos and other flourishes. Their latest album, "Señor Smoke," includes a stream-of-consciousness ballad titled "Jimmy Carter," which mentions the thirty-second, thirty-ninth, and fortieth Presidents.

HOUSE OF BLUES
329 N. Dearborn St. (312-923-2000)—March 15: George Clinton and Parliament/Funkadelic. Brilliantly guided by the perpetually eccentric Clinton, this timeless ensemble has seen its share of personnel (and name) changes, but it has always produced vital, danceable, thought-provoking songs such as "Flash Light," "Bop Gun," and "One Nation Under a Groove." The current lineup includes Sativa, also known as Shonda Clinton, the leader's granddaughter. May 26: The flaxen-haired blues veteran Johnny Winter. With Albert Cummings, a New England home builder turned blues guitarist.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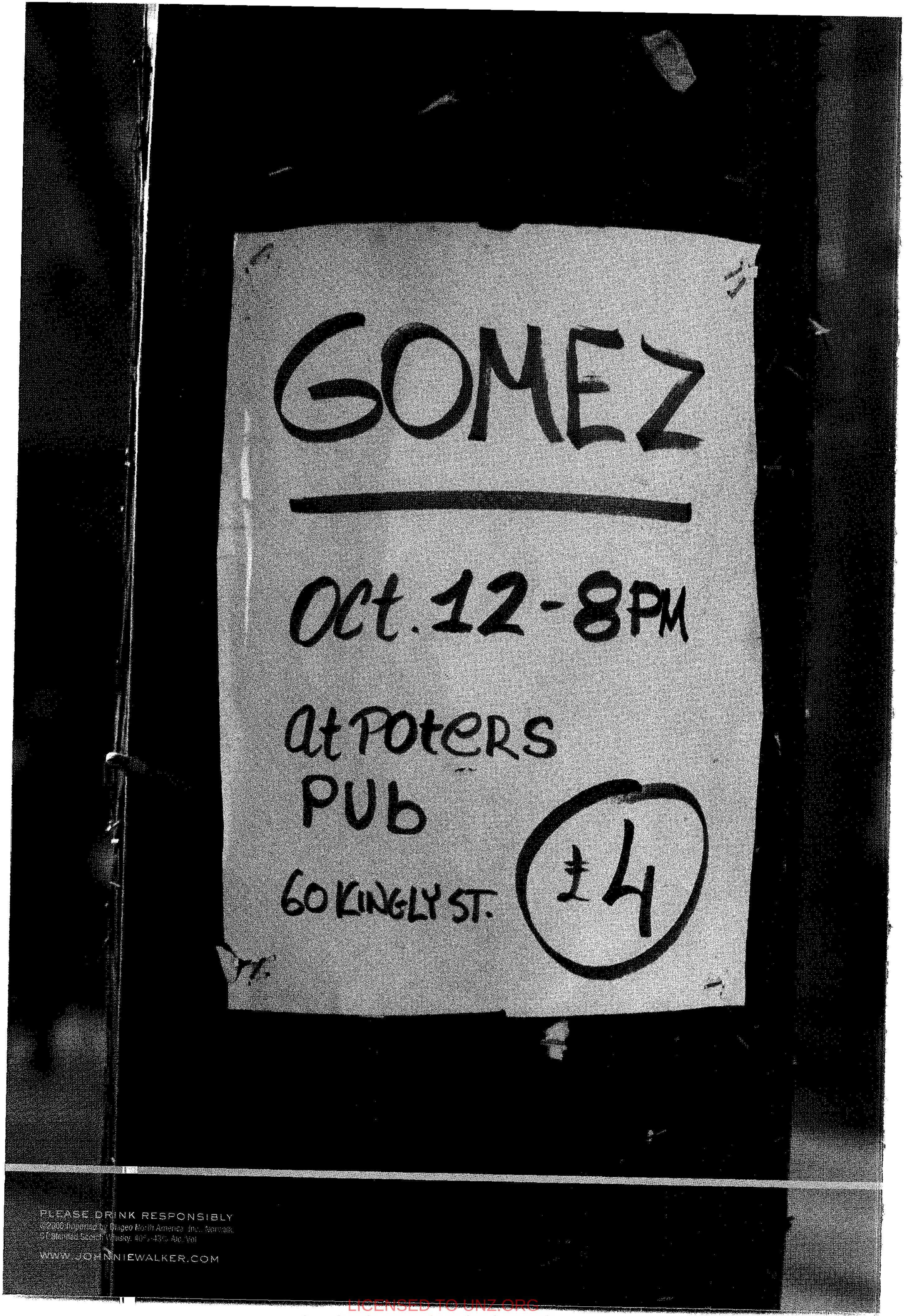
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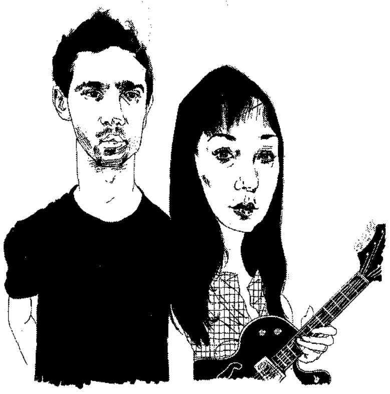
SCHUBAS TAVERN
3159 N. Southport Ave. (773-525-2508)—March 24: Scout Niblett's high, keening voice and slightly mournful songs draw immediate comparisons to the shy singer Cat Power, but Niblett has a strong stage presence and more often than not she bursts out with heavy doses of bluesy rock. March 29-30: The Canadian singer-songwriter Sarah Harmer, who recently released the album "I'm a Mountain." May 20: Glen Phillips, the former lead singer for Toad the Wet Sprocket, enlivened his band's rather unexceptional pop with a rich, emotive voice that belied the silliness of the band's name (which came from a Monty Python sketch). Last year, Phillips released the appealing solo album "Winter Pays for Summer," which reflected well on his life as a family man (he's married, with three daughters and a dog). His latest effort, "Mr. Lemons," includes a cover of Huey Lewis's hit "I Want a New Drug."

LOS ANGELES

EL REY THEATRE
5515 Wilshire Blvd. (www.theelrey.com)—March 25: Nebula. With song titles like "Synthetic Dream" and "Fields of Psilocybin," this long-haired L.A. trio rocks with a retro punch that's straight out of the Age of Aquarius. They're here with the equally loud and hairy Hellacopters, from Sweden. March 28: The driving emo quartet Thursday, which conquered the charts three years ago with the ambitious album "War All the Time," is gearing up for its new release, "A City by the Light Divided." The group is headlining the "Shirts for a Cure" tour, which supports breast-cancer research through the sale of T-shirts. The hard-touring Seattle rock band Minus the Bear is also on the bill. April 15: Lila Downs, whose mother was a Mixtec singer from Mexico and whose father was an academic from the United States, has studied opera and anthropology, and her music addresses feminism, civil rights, and the plight of Mexican immigrants. (She also contributed a number of songs to the 2002 film "Frida.") Her latest album, "La Cantina (Entre Copa y Copa)," is a rootsy affair, full of *ranchera* songs delivered with the help of the accordionist Flaco Jimenez. June 3: Giant Drag is the cute duo of Annie Hardy and Micah Calabrese. They wowed critics last year with their début album, "Hearts and Unicorns," and they keep the younger set's heads bobbing with edgy pop. They're on tour, opening for the Seattle band Pretty Girls Make Graves, which captures the spirit of vintage punk rock without sounding derivative.



Giant Drag, in Los Angeles.

LEFT: ANDY FRIEDMAN; RIGHT: JASHAR AWAN

"UCLA LIVE"
Royce Hall, 10745 Dickson Plaza (310-825-2101)—April 2: The topnotch songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter and the poet Billy Collins. April 27: Taj Mahal is a bluesman with a well-stamped musical passport—he's incorporated reggae, jazz, gospel, R. & B., zydeco, and even Hawaiian elements in his material. Sharing the bill is the legendary gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples.

THE WILTERN LG
3790 Wilshire Blvd. (213-380-5005)—March 18-19: Belle and Sebastian, the once shy and reclusive ensemble from Glasgow, and a leading ambassador of twee rock. With the faux Brit-pop of the New Pornographers. March 27: The Steely Dan co-founder Donald Fagen, who has a new album, "Morph the Cat," continues to subvert smooth jazz to deliciously nefarious effect. April 24-25: The horror rocker Rob Zombie swore off touring following his decision to become a filmmaker (last year he directed the bloodfest "The Devil's Rejects," his sequel to his 2001 release, "House of 1000 Corpses"), but it's hard to keep a good demon down. He went back into the studio recently and emerged with a new disk, "Educated Horses." The Italian goth outfit Lacuna Coil opens.

SAN FRANCISCO

THE FILLMORE
1805 Geary Blvd. (415-346-6000)—March 24: The Canadian quartet Metric injects its electro-pop with screaming guitars, New Wave synthesizers, and the occasional drum machine. April 8: The Dead Kennedys became one of the preëminent punk bands of the eighties, thanks to their manic playing and the social satire of their lyricist and vocalist, Jello Biafra. They broke up in 1986, though, in a maelstrom of lawsuits, one of which involved accusations of obscenity based on the H. R. Giger poster included in the band's 1985 album, "Frankenchrist." Now the Dead Kennedys have reunited, but, in a turn of events that's truly shocking to punk purists, sans Biafra. The newcomer Jeff Penalty is on vocals. April 21: Chris and Rich Robinson, of the Southern hedonists the Black Crowes, are touring together, performing unplugged versions of their back catalogue, as well as personal favorites and some new songs.

GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC HALL
859 O'Farrell St. (415-885-0750)—March 20: The U.K.'s Snow Patrol delivers epic guitar rock. With Deus, Belgium's answer to Coldplay. April 3: Richard Butler, taking a break from the Psychedelic Furs, is touring in support of a dreamy self-titled solo album laced with songs that would be just perfect for a teen-age slow dance. April 27: Dungen, the brainchild of a precocious multi-instrumentalist named Gustav Ejstes, is a Swedish outfit specializing in eclectic psychedelic rock. Also performing is the Go! Team, a British band that shrewdly mixes hip-hop, surf rock, and dance pop.

THE INDEPENDENT
628 Divisadero St. (415-771-1421)—March 21: The up-and-coming London five-piece band Art Brut keeps its fine songwriting and energetic performances on a higher plane, thanks to a rock-solid sense of humor. March 27: Rhett Miller, on leave from his barn-burning alt-country outfit Old 97's, stops by with songs from his latest solo release, "The Believer." April 1: Kid Koala is Eric San, a Canadian pianist turned turntablist, whose imagination is as big as his native land. Not only does he scratch ridiculous patterns and record pieces laced with animal-kingdom sounds, Dixieland-jazz passages, and snippets of conversation ("Shake loose, don't be silly, you can dance" is a favorite); he also writes and illustrates graphic novels. May 1-2: The maverick post-rock alchemists TV on the Radio.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SOUTH FOR WINTER

For the past twenty-one years, a gathering of dance-music professionals called the Winter Music Conference has taken over a section of Miami Beach for a few days in late March. The attendees are a blend of press people, industry reps, and hardy civilians, who navigate a sprawling loop of d.j. sets, live acts, and panels. Everything on the schedule seems to be co-sponsored by as many companies as can fit their logos onto the ubiquitous flyers, and no person could attend more than a few of the hundreds of events, some of which are well worth a long plane trip. This year, the Killers and Prodigy will serve those who like to see people playing instruments, while the majority of the events are given over to the work of d.j.s like Paul Van Dyk, Erick Morillo, and Richie Hawtin. But the real pleasure is in the drifting, walking down Collins Avenue any time of night and hearing d.j.s in the lobbies of small Art Deco hotels, each building arguing stylishly with its neighbor. Miami Beach itself gives the hedonistic dance community a paradoxically homey context. How radical can you be in a town where the locals shop in leopard-skin bikinis at 4 P.M.?

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

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SEATTLE

CROCODILE CAFÉ
2200 Second Ave. (206-441-5611)—March 22: The Heartless Bastards are led by Erika Wennerstrom, a petite woman with an outsized voice. The Cincinnati-based three-piece group makes big noise with its raw, bluesy approach. Sharing the bill are the Soledad Brothers, an outfit from Detroit that favors hard-edged electrified blues. March 28: We Are Scientists, a trio of wisecracking indie kids who play sharp, danceable guitar-based rock. Their major-label début is called "With Love and Squalor." March 30: The Subways are English, young, fast, and fun. April 1: The supercharged Motor City garage-rock act the Dirtbombs. April 29: The Cribs, three brothers from England who came of age listening to the Strokes (a band they clearly admire), enjoy poking fun at the hipster scene that they so desperately want to join.

EL CORAZÓN
109 Eastlake Ave. E. (206-262-0482)—March 22: Funeral for a Friend shares its name with a plangent Elton John tune, but this Welsh band is all loud guitars and frayed vocal cords. The band's third album, "Hours," is an amalgam of emo histrionics and metal-guitar heroics. April 1: A performance on the "Shirts for a Cure" tour, with Thursday, Minus the Bear, and others (see El Rey, Los Angeles). June 10: Angular guitars, a post-punk beat, and the unrestrained urge to experiment meet in the music of the Liars, from Brooklyn. They're here with the Apes, a four-piece D.C. band that proves you don't need guitars to make a ruckus. They use organs and copious amounts of energy instead.

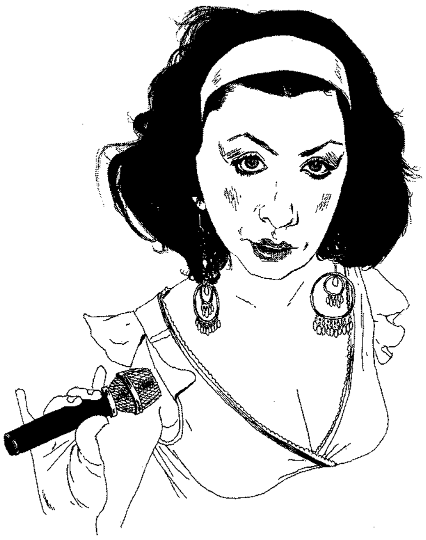
SHOWBOX
1426 First Ave. (206-628-3151)—March 17: Randy Cordeiro, a Bay Area singer who goes by the name Surreal Neil, leads Superdiamond, a long-running, extremely successful outfit that pays tribute to the pop icon Neil Diamond. April 3: The emo band Taking Back Sunday layers wordy tales of heartbreak and disillusionment (delivered with plaintive vocals) over aggressive pop-punk guitar. April 20: The jazzy Bay Area hip-hop group Blackalicious has been one of the genre's best-kept secrets since the mid-nineties.

INTERNATIONAL
LONDON

APOLLO HAMMERSMITH THEATRE
Queen Caroline St., W6 9QH (011-44-208-748-8660)—March 24: Henry Rollins. The burly, tattooed former leader of the legendary L.A. punk band Black Flag, and the leading personification of rage since the mid-eighties. April 14: The rock and soul singer and slide guitarist Bonnie Raitt has aged a bit, but she has power to spare. Last year, she released the fine album "Souls Alike." May 11: The Southampton native Craig David is an R. & B. and garage sensation. He started as a youth on his local pirate radio station, then performed in the clubs, and has since dwelled at the top of the charts. May 31: The Gipsy Kings continue to make flamenco safe for the masses.

SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRE
Shepherds Bush Green, W12 8TT (011-44-870-771-2000)—March 18-20: The Black Crowes, featuring the seventies-flavored Southern-fried retro rock of the Robinson brothers, who fervently pine for the days of Zeppelinesque hedonism. March 28: The New York alt-rock combo Nada Surf are chart veterans (their single "Popular" was something of a hit in 1996) as well as major-label casualties (they were dropped by Elektra), but above all they are indie-rock survivors. April 20: Charlotte Church, the twenty-year-old classical singing superstar and crossover artist.

WEMBLEY ARENA
Empire Way, Wembley, HA9 0DW (011-44-870-060-0870)—April 2-3: Depeche Mode, the synth-pop mainstays, led by the sonorous vocalist Dave Gahan. May 11: Earth, Wind & Fire. The group dominated the R. & B. charts in the seventies, has a hefty songbook, and knows a thing or two about pyrotechnics. Through all the smoke and pyramids wafts the immaculate falsetto of Philip Bailey, who, after three decades, is still eminently capable of transporting anyone to boogie wonderland. May 12-13: Santana. It's been some forty years since the guitarist sprinkled a little chili pepper into rock and roll, but his voice, to say nothing of his pop instincts, remains a force of nature.



Charlotte Church, in London.

PARIS

L'OLYMPIA
28 Boulevard des Capucines, 9e. (011-33-1-55-27-10-00)—March 16: The guitarist David Gilmour recently released "On an Island," a solo album that, in its epic, perfectly paced guitar solos, recalls the best of his regular band, Pink Floyd. April 18: Riders on the Storm sounds like a Doors cover band, which it is. But there's none with a better pedigree: this outfit features Ray Manzarek, the original keyboardist, and Robby Krieger, the original guitarist. Ian Astbury, of the Cult, is handling the vocals. (Jim Morrison, of course, is rolling over in his grave, nearby in Père Lachaise.) May 18: The colossal jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins.

PALAIS OMNISPORTS
8 Boulevard de Bercy, 12e. (011-33-1-40-02-60-60)—March 23: The Dutch-born violinist Andre Rieu, otherwise known as the Waltz King. May 28: Eric Clapton, the guitar god, fresh from a reunion of the seminal power trio Cream, performs here solo.

LE ZÉNITH
211 Avenue Jean Jaurès, 19e. (011-33-1-44-52-54-60)—March 20: Toto had its greatest success in the early eighties, with hits like "Hold the Line," "Rosanna," and "Africa." May 8: Iggy and the Stooges. One of the most revered bands in the history of rock and roll, the original Stooges lit the fires that ignited hard rock, heavy metal, punk, and indie rock.

SYDNEY

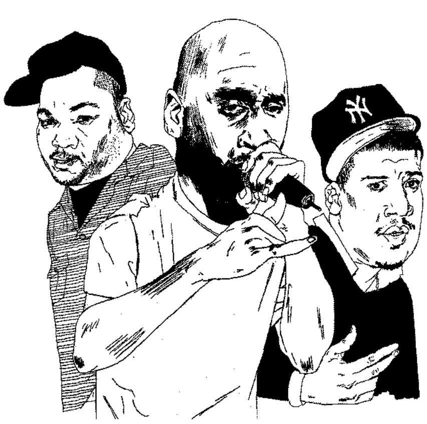
ENMORE THEATRE
130 Enmore Rd., Newtown (011-61-2-9550-3666)—March 23: De La Soul. With their 1989 début album, "3 Feet High and Rising," this trio from the suburbs of New York City appeared poised to change the face of hip-hop. They did, briefly, and survived to become elder statesmen of the genre. April 10: The acoustic-blues throwback Keb' Mo'. April 11: Jackson Browne's recent efforts haven't approached the success of his output in the seventies and eighties, but he's not exactly running on empty. April 13: Damien (Jr. Gong) Marley and Femi Kuti continue on their fathers' paths, which are reggae and Afro-pop, respectively. April 19: The incendiary bluesman Buddy Guy is nearing seventy, but there's no sign that he's losing his fire. With the soulful blues singer Robert Cray.

METRO THEATRE
624 George St. (011-61-2-9287-2000)—April 7: The Suicide Girls All Rock N Roll Live Burlesque Review. Sex and rock and roll: two out of three ain't bad. April 12: Los Lobos, the kings of East L.A., who rode "La Bamba" to the top of the charts in 1987, keep on cruising. April 21: The Canadian singer-songwriter Martha Wainwright has deep folk roots: her parents are Loudon Wainwright III and Kate McGarrigle, and her brother is Rufus Wainwright. Her style is highly confessional, and her wide-ranging voice suits her many moods.

SYDNEY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE
35 Harbour St., Darling Harbour (011-61-2-9320-4200)—April 22: The Welsh troubadour David Gray, one of the kings of adult alternative pop, has a boyishly photogenic look and a taste for up-to-date rhythms. May 5: Donny Osmond, on his first tour of Australia in a quarter century. The teen-pop icon may no longer cause young girls to swoon, but he still has that blinding signature smile. Last year, he released the album "What I Meant to Say."

TOKYO

BLUE NOTE
6-1-16 Minami Aoyama, Raika Building, Minato-ku (011-81-3-5485-0088)—March 27-29: Spyro Gyra, the lite-jazz standard-bearer and perpetual critics' punching bag. April 5-9: Al Di Meola has come a long way since the manic heyday of fusion. The dexterous guitarist's passion is now world music. May 12-14: The innovative guitarist Bill Frisell, playing with the organist Sam Yahel and the drummer Brian Blade, brings new twists to the time-honored trio setting. June 19-24: A musical institution by now, the Manhattan Transfer flaunts tight harmonies and infectious good humor.



De La Soul, in Sydney.

SHIBUYA AX
2-1-1 Jinnan, Shibuya-ku (011-81-3-5738-2020)—March 28-29: The chart-topping Florida pop-punk band Yellowcard delivers crunchy guitars, earnest lyrics, and surprisingly catchy melodies. April 4-5: The Icelandic ensemble Sigur Rós writes and performs soaring, epic pieces in its native language. April 24: The English singer and Kosovo war veteran James Blunt specializes in tender ballads that spill over with declarations of unrequited love.

SHIBUYA CLUB QUATTRO
32-13 Udagawa-cho, Quattro PARCO, Shibuya-ku (011-81-3-3477-8750)—March 16-17: Cake, the No. 1 rock band of Sacramento, California, delivers guitar pop full of wit and charm. May 22-23: The Swedish powerhouse Nocturnal Rites employs a double-bass and double-guitar assault in the service of old-school metal along the lines of Iron Maiden and Judas Priest.

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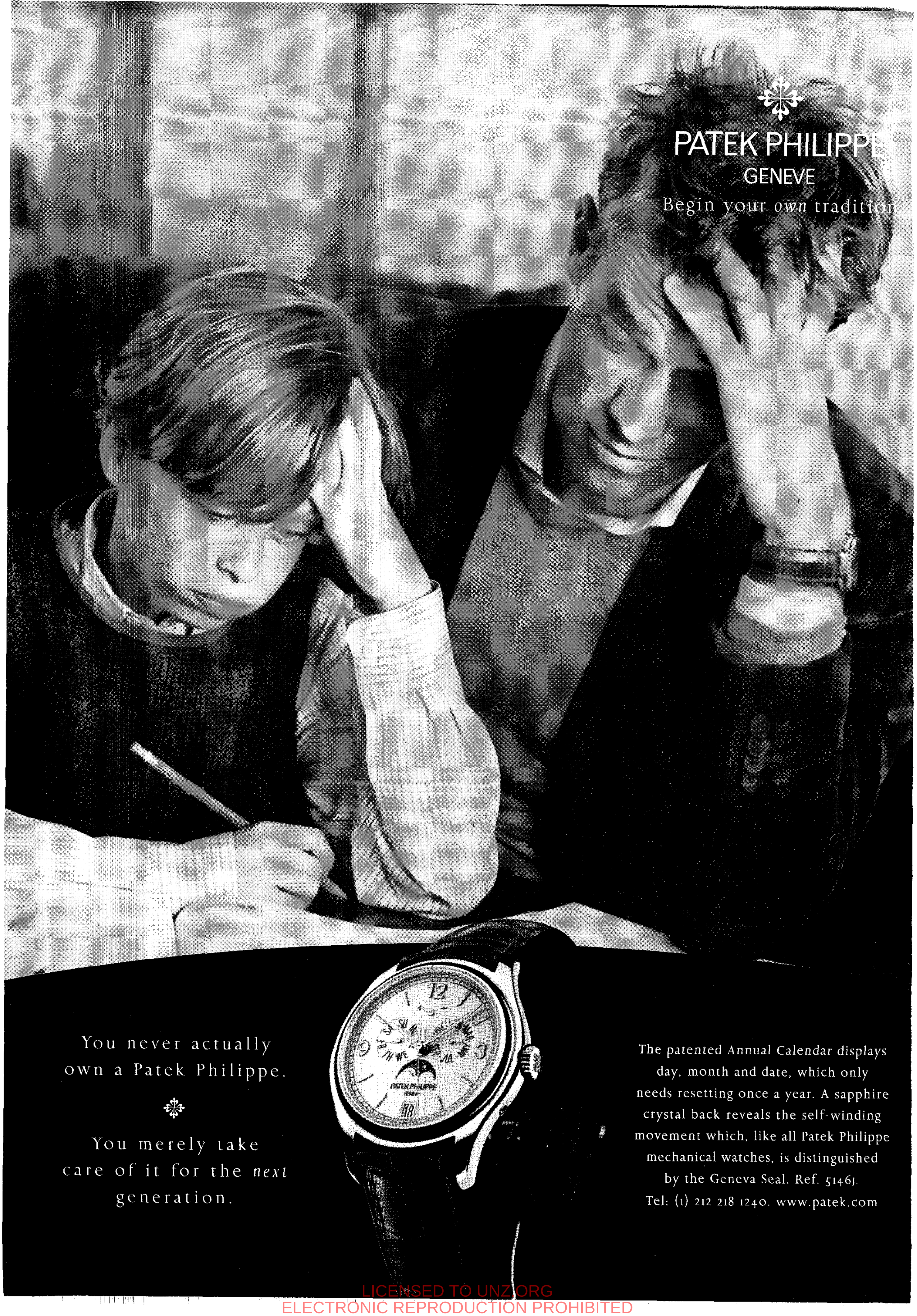

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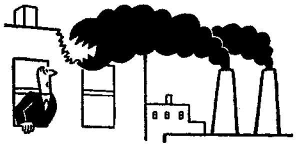
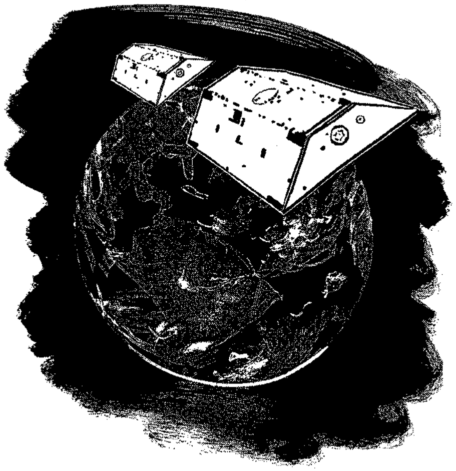


In March, 2002, NASA and the Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt, the German aerospace agency, launched a pair of satellites from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome, a former intercontinental-ballistic-missile site in northern Russia, to map changes in the earth's surface. The satellites, nicknamed Tom and Jerry, have been chasing each other around the globe ever since. Separated by a gap of approximately a hundred and thirty-seven miles, they sometimes pull apart, only to draw closer again. By monitoring their relative positions to the fantastic exactitude of one micron—less than one-fiftieth the width of a human hair—scientists can detect tiny variations in the earth's gravitational field.

Now, almost four years to the day after they were launched, Tom and Jerry have yielded a scarily significant result: Antarctica is losing ice. The rate of loss, according to researchers at the University of Colorado, in Boulder, who analyzed changes in the continent's gravitational pull, is around thirty-six cubic miles per year. (For comparison's sake, the city of Los Angeles uses about one-fifth of a cubic mile of water annually.) The finding, which was reported two weeks ago in the online version of *Science*, is particularly ominous, because climatologists had expected that even as the ice sheet lost mass at its edges, its over-all mass would increase, since rising temperatures would lead to more snowfall over the continent's midsection. If the loss continues, it will mean that predictions for the rise in the sea level for the coming century are seriously understated.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The news from Antarctica follows a string of similarly grim discoveries. In September, satellite measurements showed that the extent of the Arctic ice cap had shrunk to the smallest area ever recorded, prompting a prediction that the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free in summer "well before the end of this century." Around the same time, a group of British scientists reported that soils in England and Wales have been losing carbon at the rate of four million metric tons a year, a loss that is at once a symptom of warming and—as much of that carbon is released into the atmosphere—a likely cause of more. In January, researchers at NASA'S Goddard Institute for Space Studies concluded that 2005 had been the hottest year on record, and, in February, a team of scientists from NASA and the University of Kansas announced that the flow of ice from glaciers in Greenland had more than doubled over the past decade. Earlier this month, the Washington *Post* reported that the mountain pine beetle, a pest once kept in check by winter cold, has decimated huge swaths of forest in western Canada. Officials with the Canadian Forest Service say that the beetle has crossed the Rockies and they fear that it will soon start eating its way east. "People say climate change is something for our kids to worry about," one official told the *Post*. "No. It's now."



In the face of such news, how does a country, i.e. the United States, justify further inaction? Certainly, there isn't much tread left in the argument that global warming is, to use Senator James Inhofe's famous formulation, a "hoax." In January, six former heads of the Environmental Protection Agency, five of whom had served under Republican Administrations, met with the current administrator, Stephen Johnson, for a panel discussion in Washington. Panelists were

"It's all marketing—no one actually wears that stuff."

• •

asked to hold up their hands if they believed global warming to be a real problem, for which human activity was responsible. Every one of them, Johnson included, raised a hand.

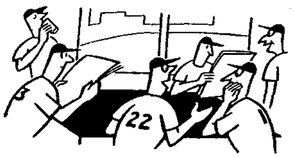
But where there's a will there is, indeed, always a way. The new argument making the rounds of conservative think tanks, like the National Center for Policy Analysis, and circulating through assorted sympathetic publications goes something like this: Yes, the planet may be warming up, but no one can be sure of why, and, in any case, it doesn't matter—let's stop quibbling about the causes of climate change and concentrate on dealing with the consequences. A recent column in the *Wall Street Journal* laid out the logic as follows: "The problems associated with climate change (whether man-made or natural) are the same old problems of poverty, disease, and natural hazards like floods, storms, and droughts." Therefore "money spent directly on these problems is a much surer bet than money spent trying to control a climate change process that we don't understand." Sounding an eerily similar note, a column published a few days later in the *National Review Online* stated, "We can do more to help the poor by combating these problems now than we would by reducing carbon dioxide emissions."

The beauty of this argument is its apparent high-mindedness, and this, of course, is also its danger. Carbon dioxide is a persistent gas—it lasts for about a century—and once released into the atmosphere it is, for all practical purposes, irrecoverable. Since every extra increment of CO_2 leads to extra warming, addressing the effects of climate change without dealing with the cause is a bit like trying to treat diabetes with doughnuts. The climate isn't going to change just once, and then settle down; unless CO_2 concentrations are stabilized, it will keep on changing, producing, in addition to the "same old problems," an ever-growing array of new ones. The head of the Goddard Institute, James Hansen, who first warned about the dangers of global warming back in the nineteen-seventies and recently made headlines by accusing the Bush Administration of censorship, has said that following the path of business-as-usual for the remainder of this century will lead to an earth so warm as to be "practically a different planet." In a world thus transformed, the only sure bet is that there will be no sure bets.

A project like Tom and Jerry demonstrates all the strengths of American science: technological sophistication, restless curiosity, and monumental budgets. But, at the same time, it points to the fundamental disconnect in our culture. Why spend tens of millions of dollars to produce such an elegant set of measurements only to ignore them? With knowledge comes responsibility, and so it is that we turn from the knowledge we have gone to such lengths to acquire.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

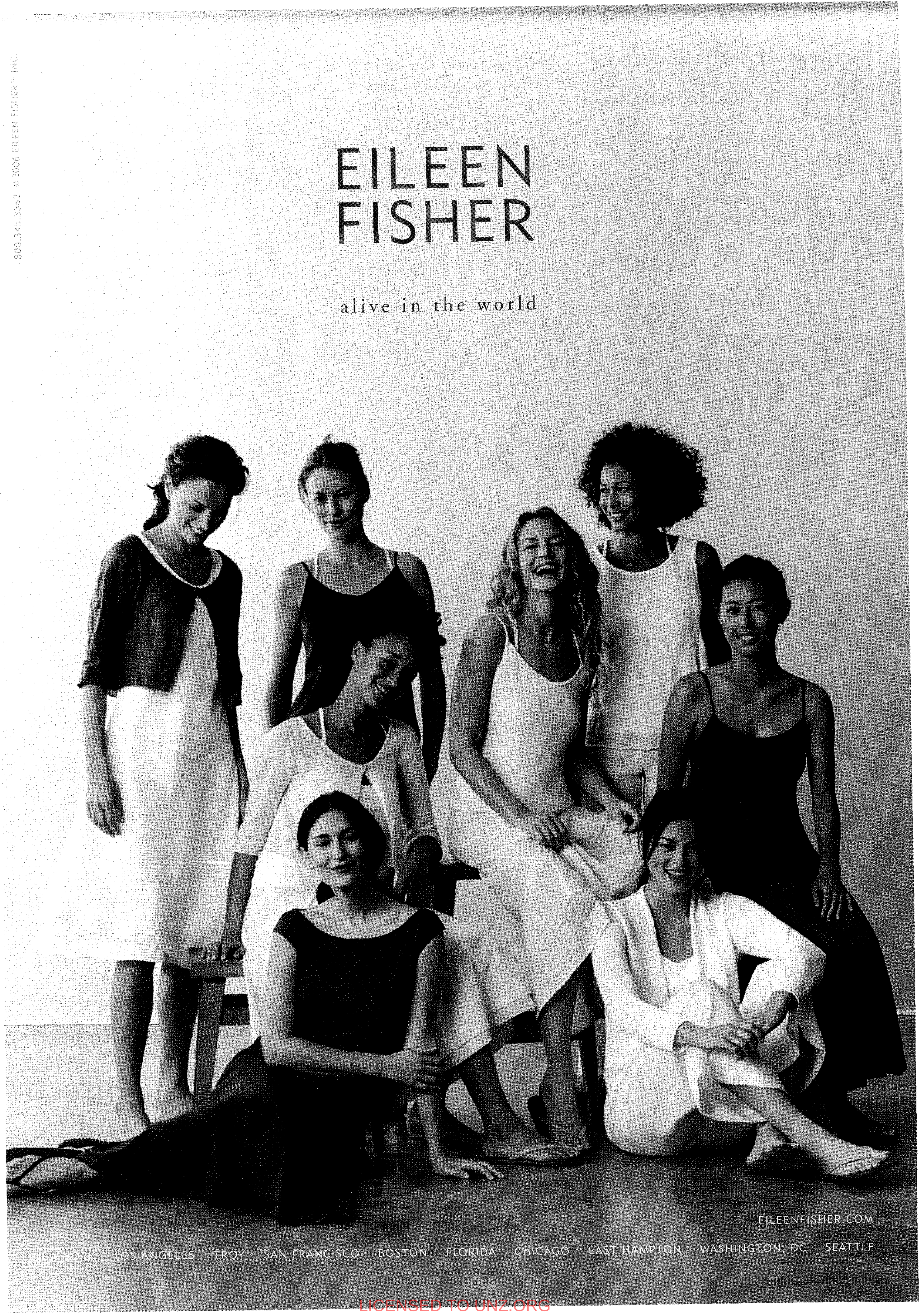
SPRING TRAINING DEPT.
MEET THE METS



In a week, the Mets will have assembled in full at Port St. Lucie, back from representing their various native countries at the World Baseball Classic. Expectations are high. The last time fans were this optimistic was probably 1988. Those Mets, who won a division title (as none have since), were a brash, hard-living bunch, the stuff of tabloid legend: Doc and Darryl, Nails, Coney, HoJo, El Sid. And what of this year's squad? Much has been made of the growing Hispanic influence, sought by Omar Minaya, the general manager, and of the outspoken liberal politics of the new slugger Carlos Delgado, but perhaps the best portrait of the 2006 Mets can be gleaned from an unwieldy spreadsheet assembled last week by Sandra van Meek, a member of the team's communications department.

Van Meek set out to catalogue the "answers to some questions people like to ask about the players," she wrote in an e-mail. Those questions include the names of the players' pets, the dishes they most like to cook, their game-day superstitions, and their favorite board games. A few of the stars (Pedro Martinez, Delgado, Billy Wagner) eluded van Meek's survey, but twenty-six players participated, providing a broad sample from which to generalize.

The team is certainly diverse, like the borough it plays in. Six languages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are spoken, or could be spoken, in the clubhouse: English, Spanish, Spanglish, Swedish, German, and Japanese. Musical taste runs from James Taylor (Tom Glavine) to Jay-Z (Cliff Floyd and Victor Diaz) to Wisin y Yandel (three players). Career aspirations, if baseball had not been an option, range wide: a cop (David Wright), a veterinarian (Carlos Beltran), a soldier, a doctor, a lawyer, a pastor, a financial planner, a teacher, a hockey player.

Taken as a statistical composite, however, the typical Met has 1.08 children (pick a name: Bella, Tobias, Yomar) and a dog, probably a terrier (Mitch Wylie's is called Gucci). He started playing baseball when he was six years and two months old, and in grade school his best subject was math—the better for calculating his stats. He now drives a Mercedes, a BMW, or a Cadillac (and possibly some combination thereof). He likes rice and beans, and among meats he favors pork chops. Every so often, he gets out the spatula and fires up the Weber.

Mr. Met 2006

The typical Met's golf handicap, if he's willing to name one, is around eleven or twelve—the result of almost a decade of links experience. Two individuals stand out as outliers in this regard: Steve Trachsel, who, despite twenty years of practice, is still a twenty handicap, and Philip Humber, the team's first-round draft pick in 2004, who learns quick and has an eight handicap after only three years of playing.

The average Met is just as likely to read *Maxim* as the Bible, but, to be honest, reading isn't his strength; his main hobbies are basketball and fishing. Under "Would like to meet," four Mets name the Pope; one lists Rachel McAdams. Generally speaking, today's Met seems a little less wild than his predecessors of the late eighties, favoring Chicago, for instance, over Miami by a small margin. He is concerned about young people, whether in this country or internationally, and he does his part to eradicate cancer. His favorite actress, depending on the day, is Sandra Bullock, Angelina Jolie, or Reese Witherspoon.

Some of the lesser-known pitchers are deserving of special mention. Heath Bell, a young reliever, has a hamster named Blossom and a cousin, Drake Bell, who is a TV star (on Nickelodeon), and for quick cash in high school he baked and sold gingerbread houses. Yusaku Iriki, a thirty-three-year-old making his American début this spring, did not start playing baseball until he turned fifteen. (His favorite sport is kickboxing, and he is partial to Bob Marley.) Duaner Sanchez plays the trumpet.

Here are your highbrows: Steve Trachsel (Scrabble, *Wine Spectator*, "pecan-crusted" pork chops) and Aaron Heilman (Trivial Pursuit, *Scientific American*, philosophy, Discovery Channel). Here's your lowbrow: Xavier Nady (bowling, Las Vegas, "Dumb and Dumber").

Certainly these Mets are a far cry from the original teams in the sixties, as Dan Reilly remembers them. Reilly, who is sixty-eight, was the first ever Mr. Met, introducing the iconic papier-mâché baseball costume to Shea Stadium fans in 1964. "Jack Fisher and Ron Swoboda were both from Maryland, and they used to have little parties where they'd serve the soft-shell crabs," he said. "A couple of the guys were show guys—Broadway shows. I don't think these guys today are into that. Back then they liked art, they liked jazz."

Reilly is working on a book called "The Original Mr. Met Remembers." "We didn't need questionnaires in those days," he said. "We just knew the players."

—*Ben McGrath*

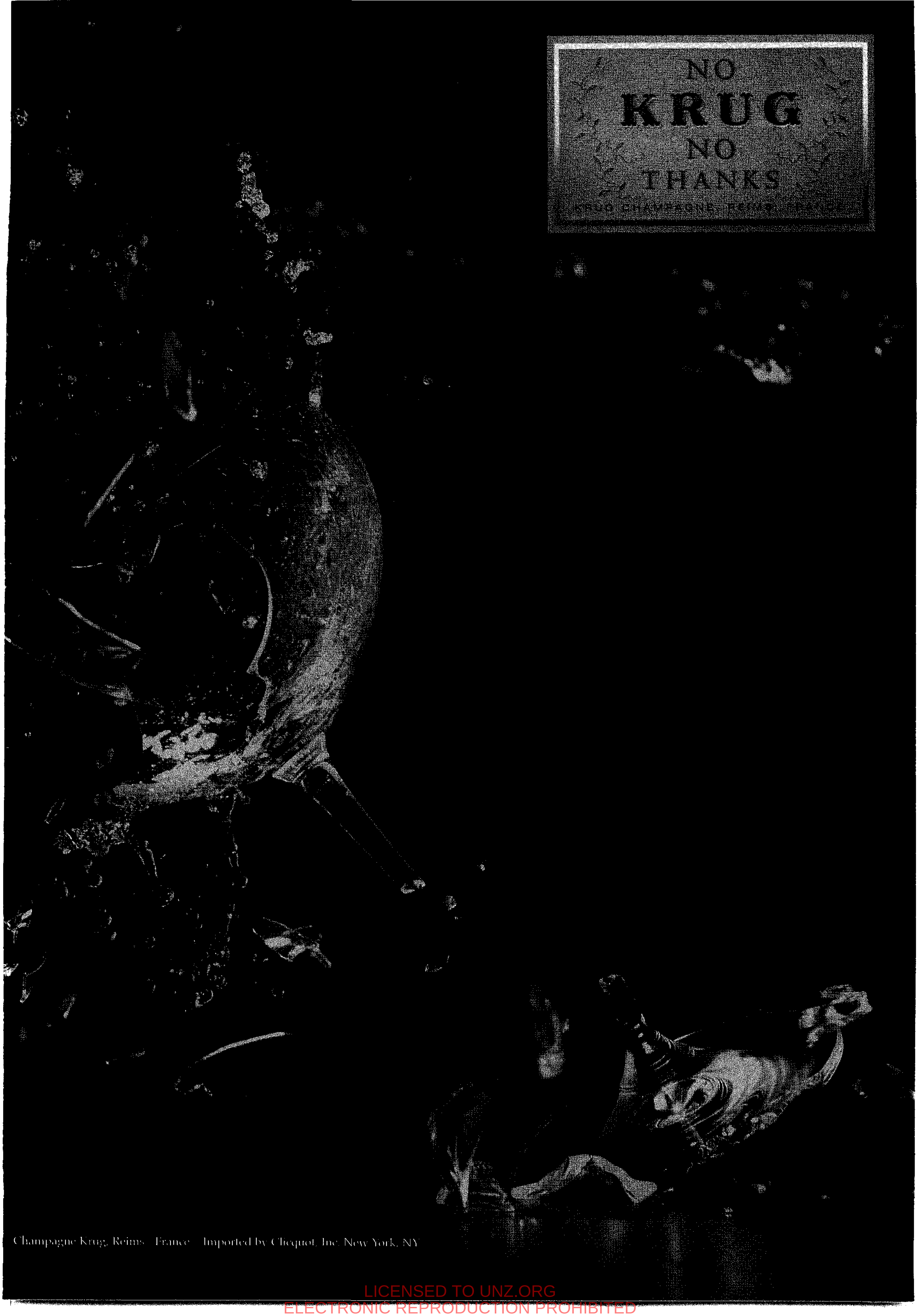
THE MUSICAL LIFE
GLASS'S MASTER CLASS

Toward the end of his life, Samuel Beckett wrote a dramatic monologue called "Company," in which an old man lies in a dark room, thinking despairingly back on his existence. As in other Beckett works, the feel-good message is that dying begins at the moment of birth. In 1983, Frederick Neumann, a co-director of Mabou Mines, staged a performance of "Company," and he asked Philip Glass to compose some music for the production. Glass wrote a string quartet, in four parts, and Beckett approved the music, stipulating that it " 'only be played in the interstices of the play,' " Glass recalled recently. "Whatever the hell that meant."

Glass regarded the composition as *Gebrauchsmusik*, which means "music for use"—"like salt and pepper," he said, "just something for the table." He never expected to hear the music after the play closed, but the short piece has taken on a life of its own, and has been performed in a variety of contexts far removed from Beckett's text. "It just seems to find people," Glass said.

On the first Sunday in March, the music was performed by the Philharmonia, a string ensemble of top New York City music students, ranging in age from thirteen to eighteen, at the Third Street Music School Settlement, in the East Village. Glass, who is sixty-nine, lives nearby, and he and his wife, Holly, have two small children in Third Street's preschool program. On the day before the concert, Glass, who was to perform several pieces on piano in the concert, offered to work with the students in their final rehearsal.

Barbara Field, the executive director of Third Street, greeted the composer, and they chatted briefly in her office, mostly about the sad state of music education in the city's public schools. Field noted that Third Street is the oldest community music school in the country. (In 1912, students raised funds to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THANKS
KRUG CHAMPAGNE REIMS FRANCE

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benefit the survivors of musicians lost on the Titanic.) Glass, whose father owned a record store in Baltimore, said, "My public school taught music. Not only did they teach us to play—they gave us our instruments!" He added that he played bass trumpet and glockenspiel in the high-school marching band during football games.

The students, who were waiting for Glass in the auditorium, had been working on "Company" since December. Most of them were unfamiliar with Glass's music, although the first violinist, sixteen-year-old Odetta Hartman, had heard some of it on the soundtrack for "The Truman Show." "My brother played that all the time," she said.

The ensemble was used to performing pieces like Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, with dramatic pianissimo-to-fortissimo changes. "Company" is more intimate. Like Beckett's text, the music is built out of simple phrases worked up into hypnotic patterns. But if you listen closely you can hear a snatch of a tune—a single E note sustained for sixteen measures, like a ray of lyricism escaping from the tight grid of rhythm.

Glass sat down in front of the kids, and they played the first part of the piece. The composer listened with a placid but attentive expression, like a cat watching the street from a windowsill.

When the music ended, Glass talked with Hartman, who is a junior at Dalton. He said, of the long E, "I know it's only one note, but try to get the most out of it."

"Should we play it open string or vibrato?" asked Hartman, a pretty girl with dark hair down to her waist.

"Why don't half of you do it one way and half the other?" Glass said. ("That was so cool that he said that," Leo Singer, the first cello, said later. "We never get to do that.")

They tried it again.

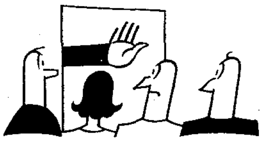
"Yes," Glass said to Hartman. "You did a little crescendo—that's a very good idea."

The following day, shortly after five, the students carried their instruments into the auditorium, while their parents applauded. Hartman wore black and had a sparkly clip in her hair. Philip Glass and his wife were sitting in the front row. Hartman tuned the others, and they began to play. She put her bow to the E string. It was a mournful sound, but the crescendo seemed to suggest that if dying begins at the moment of birth, so does living.

When the piece ended, Glass walked forward and shook Hartman's hand, and joined the company for a bow.

—*John Seabrook*

KIDS TODAY DEPT.
TAGGERS



Mikey Sklar is twenty-eight. He is five feet six, with an oval face, a high forehead, dark eyes, and brown hair in dreadlocks that fall to the middle of his back. His appearance is post-modern. He has no tattoos, for example, or any desire to have any parts of his body pierced. He does have a radio-frequency identification chip implanted in him, though, and he is enthusiastic about having other electronic devices implanted in him, too. An RFID chip is about the size of a grain of rice. People who use them in novel ways call them tags. They call themselves taggers; someone with a chip implanted in him has been tagged. The key-chain implement that you wave at a gas pump operates by means of a tag. Veterinarians sometimes implant a tag in a pet, so that a lost animal can be scanned, and its owner found. Taggers in Spain hold their hands in front of scanners and are admitted to the V.I.P. areas of night clubs.

Around Thanksgiving, Sklar had his tag implanted between his left thumb and forefinger. He wanted to be able to pass his hand in front of his computer and have the computer's security system recognize his password. He bought his tag online, from a company called PhidgetsUSA, for two dollars and ten cents. It is a livestock tag, meaning that it is typically embedded in an animal as a means of tracking its whereabouts at the slaughterhouse. Sklar bought an injector gun, to implant the tag, for seventeen pounds from a British company, also online. While he waited for the tag to arrive, he looked for someone to install it. "I found a retired vet assistant—she may have been fired—who used to implant tags in animals," he says. The injector gun turned out to be much larger than Sklar had imagined. "It was a really big syringe," he says. In the end, he persuaded a surgeon he knew to install the tag. The operation, which took seven minutes, was performed, with local anesthetic, at the kitchen table of Sklar's loft, in Brooklyn. "I immediately ran over to the computer and waved my hand, and it read the chip," he says. For two days, his hand was a bit sore when he typed.

Until February, when he quit, Sklar made his living working with computers at an investment bank in Manhattan. "Each evening, I would come home and build electronics—make circuit boards, work with schematics, solder up parts, build my own little computers." He became interested in tags while producing what he calls electric clothing. "Mostly, it lights up. It's designed for walking around the desert, or riding my bicycle, at night—riding my bicycle at, say, the Burning Man festival, which is in the desert and pitch-dark. It's a serious problem there."

A few weeks ago, Sklar and his girlfriend moved from Brooklyn to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. They plan to open the Escuela del Fuego (School of Fire), where they will "teach students to program fire," Sklar says. He makes interactive fire-art installations. Electronics are involved. There isn't a lot of money in it. While Sklar lines up students, he is building two "fire trampolines" for a fair in San Mateo, California. When people jump on the trampolines, propane-gas flames will rise fifteen feet away. The trampolines will have a security system programmed to recognize Sklar's tag. That way, no one can tamper with them when he's not around.

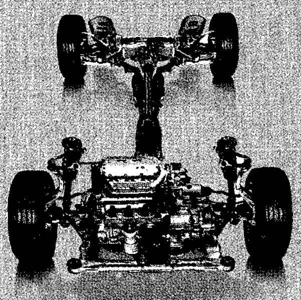
Another use that Sklar intends for his tag involves the locks to his new house. He plans to open and close the locks by means of scanners, so that he can wave his hand "like a superhero," he says, and have his front door open. At the moment, the project is stalled. The locks have arrived, he says, "but the movers only got here yesterday."

—*Alec Wilkinson*

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN. WHAT COULD HAPPEN.

DOESN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN.

RL



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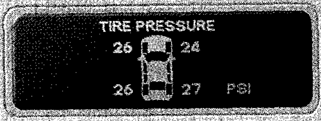

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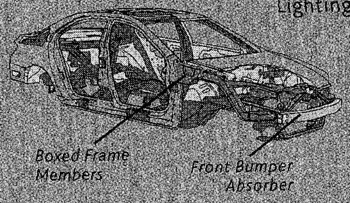

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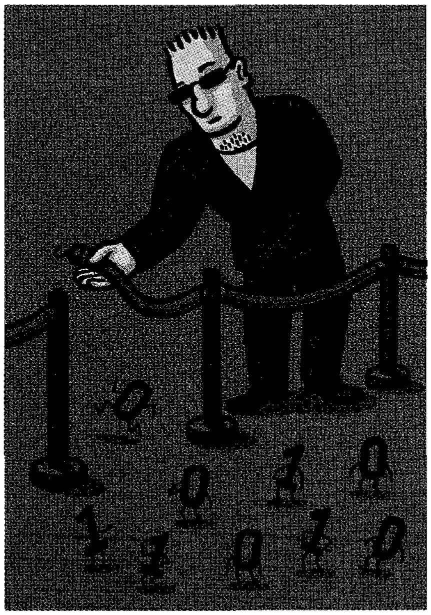
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
NET LOSSES

In the first decades of the twentieth century, as a national telephone network spread across the United States, A.T. & T. adopted a policy of "tiered access" for businesses. Companies that paid an extra fee got better service: their customers' calls went through immediately, were rarely disconnected, and sounded crystal-clear. Those who didn't pony up had a harder time making calls out, and people calling them sometimes got an "all circuits busy" response. Over time, customers gravitated toward the higher-tier companies and away from the ones that were more difficult to reach. In effect, A.T. & T.'s policy turned it into a corporate kingmaker.

If you've never heard about this bit of business history, there's a good reason: it never happened. Instead, A.T. & T. had to abide by a "common carriage" rule: it provided the same quality of service to all, and could not favor one customer over another. But, while "tiered access" never influenced the spread of the telephone network, it is becoming a major issue in the evolution of the Internet. Until recently, companies that provided Internet access followed a de-facto common-carriage rule, usually called "network neutrality," which meant that all Web sites got equal treatment. Network neutrality was considered so fundamental to the success of the Net that Michael Powell, when he was chairman of the F.C.C., described it as one of the basic rules of "Internet freedom." In the past few months, though, companies like A.T. & T. and BellSouth have been trying to scuttle it. In the future, Web sites that pay extra to providers could receive what BellSouth recently called "special treatment," and those that don't could end up in the slow lane. One day, BellSouth customers may find that, say, NBC.com loads a lot faster than YouTube.com, and that the sites BellSouth favors just seem to run more smoothly. Tiered access will turn the providers into Internet gatekeepers.

The logic of the tiered-access approach is simple: broadband companies do the work of providing Internet access, so they should be able to charge what they can for it. Telecom executives say that the revenue from tiered access would let them invest more in adding bandwidth and improving download speeds, and argue that Web sites are parasites taking, as A.T. &T.'s chairman, Edward E. Whitacre, Jr., put it, a "free ride" on the pipes the broadband companies own. But these companies have pipes into people's homes in the first place only because of a long history of government regulation, and people want to use those pipes only because of all the value the so-called parasites have created. And it's that value which tiered access—even if it does improve the Internet's infrastructure—will put in harm's way. The Internet has become a remarkable fount of economic and social innovation largely because it's been an archetypal level playing field, on which even sites with little or no money behind them—blogs, say, or Wikipedia—can become influential. If the Internet turns into a zone of tiered access, it will be harder for noncommercial sites or startup companies to compete with bigger firms.



Broadband providers insist that they have no plans to block access or degrade service to those who don't pay a premium rate. But if some companies are getting better service, then all the others are getting worse service. Besides, there have already been examples of active discrimination. Last year, a rural telecom company in North Carolina blocked its users' access to the Internet-based phone service Vonage, and in Canada the telecom company Telus blocked access to a Web site supporting the telecommunications workers' union. Market forces will offer some check to this kind of interference—if a particular provider goes too far, customers will take their business elsewhere—but, in the world of broadband, market forces are weak, because most cities have only two major providers. More than ninety per cent of Americans get Internet service from either their local phone company or their local cable company, and A.T. & T.'s newly announced acquisition of BellSouth means that there will soon be only three major phone companies in the entire U.S.

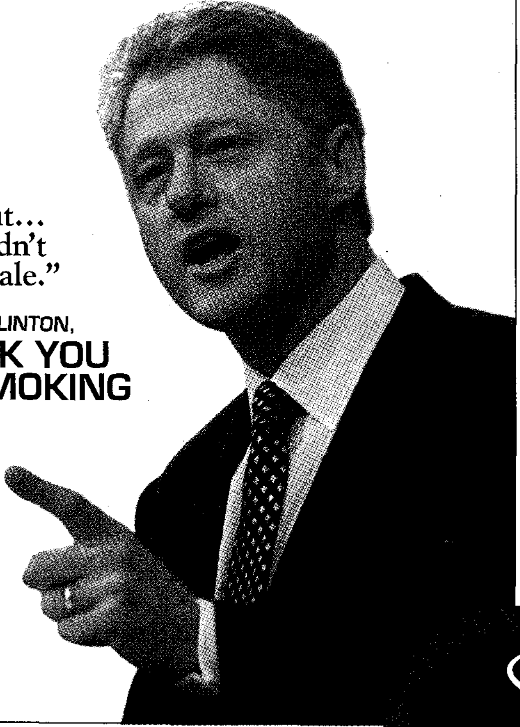
Ultimately, Internet providers hope to manage the Internet the way a supermarket owner manages his store, charging companies "slotting fees" in exchange for better shelf space, or the way bookstores charge publishers extra in order to have books placed on tables at the front of the store. Up to this point, the Internet has been operated more or less like a public utility. All bits of data have been treated similarly, just as the highway system doesn't allow trucks from some companies to go faster than others, and the electrical grid does not deliver reliable power to some customers and erratic service to others. We could write this principle into law, as a new bill sponsored by Ron Wyden, a Democratic senator from Oregon, proposes. But the bill's chances of success are slim at best. Increasingly, it seems likely that the Net will end up looking less like the highway system and more like a collection of Safeways.

A collection of Safeways is not a terrible thing—supermarkets in the U.S. do a good job of delivering food that people want, at a reasonable cost—but it's hardly what we've come to expect of the Internet. Decisions that once were made collectively by hundreds of millions of Internet users would now be shaped in large part by a handful of telecom executives. It used to be said that the Internet was all about "disintermediation." With the end of network neutrality, the middlemen are striking back.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

GREAT MOMENTS IN SPIN



"But…
I didn't
inhale."

– BILL CLINTON,

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

GREAT MOMENTS IN SPIN

"Guns don't kill people,
people kill people."

– NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION,

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

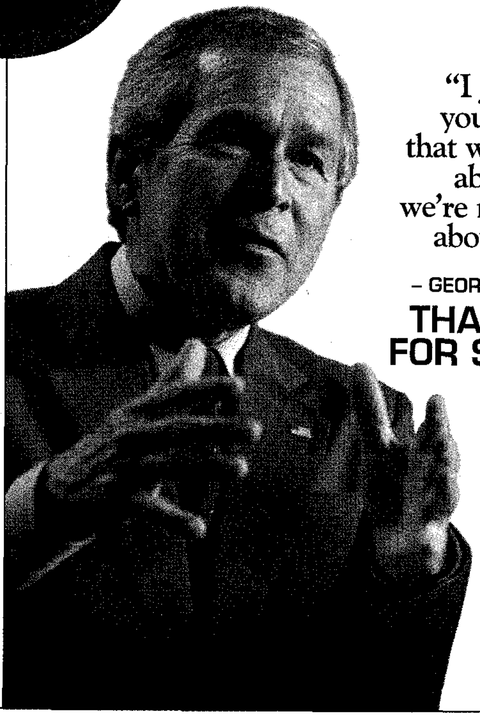
GREAT MOMENTS IN SPIN

"If the glove don't fit,
you must acquit."

– JOHNNIE COCHRAN,

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

GREAT MOMENTS IN SPIN



"I just want
you to know
that when we talk
about war,
we're really talking
about peace."

– GEORGE W. BUSH,

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

Aaron ECKHART **Maria BELLO** **Adam BRODY** **Sam ELLIOTT** **Katie HOLMES** **Rob LOWE** **William H. MACY** and **Robert DUVALL**

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IN THEATRES THIS MARCH

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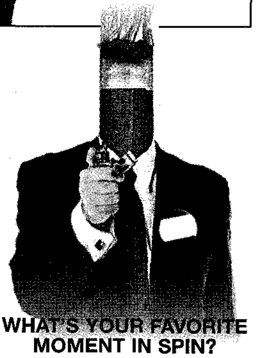

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MOMENT IN SPIN?

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ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

TO SHOP AND DRIVE IN L.A.

Store-hopping out West.

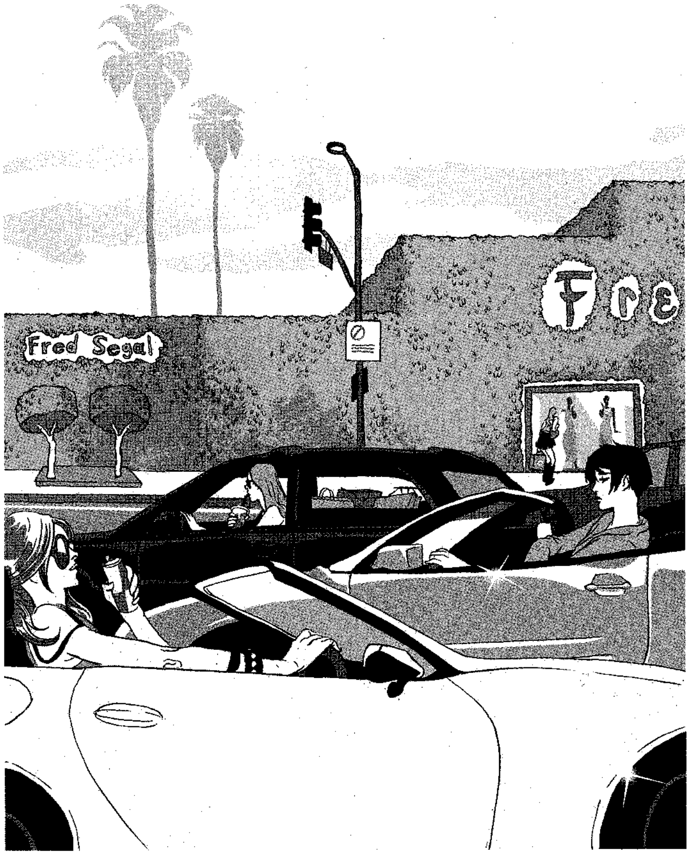
BY PATRICIA MARX

Please don't take this the wrong way, Los Angeles, but when we on the East Coast think of you, high fashion does not come to mind. You are jeans and tank tops; white leather jackets with fringe and rhinestones; velour tracksuits; enormous sunglasses; unnaturally taut and tanned skin; evening gowns with bodices too small for the oversized breasts they cradle. You are the city where every day is casual Friday, every night is an awards ceremony, and everyone is, sartorially speaking, sixteen years old—with the exception of those who actually *are* sixteen, for they look at least twenty-seven.

Los Angeles, I will give you a week to dispel this prejudice. For seven days, I will tool around town in a dented Chevy sedan, always with an ice-blended non-coffee concoction in the beverage holder, stopping to shop wherever parking permits.

But first I must apologize for my pants. The message everywhere is the same: skinny-legged denim is in; everything else is out, and that goes for my boot-cut dungarees. But not just any tapered cut will do. I am desperate for what I cannot have; namely, the Australian-made Tsubis, sold out in nearly every boutique I visit. If you do score a pair, they will set you back around $350. Other brands of choice include Denim 1921 (made in Canada from Japanese fabric) and Hysteric Glamour (made in Japan, Canada not involved).

Let's start on Robertson Boulevard, on the tree-lined blocks between Beverly and Third. Perhaps you recognize this stretch? This is where stars shop when they hope to be photographed while shopping. It used to be that customers wanted their privacy protected, but then, about three years ago, Fraser Ross, the owner of a mini department store called Kitson (115 South Robertson), came up with the idea of alerting paparazzi whenever a person of note dropped by and tipping off the editors of fashion magazines about which items his famous patrons had bought. Thus it is now common at many fancy stores to have paparazzi zones, snapshot-optimal lighting, and, occasionally, a red carpet outside. "It's good for the magazines, good for us, and good for the celebrities, who would rather be seen coming out of a shop than stumbling out of a bar, drunk," Ross says.



In L.A., what you drive is as important as what you wear.

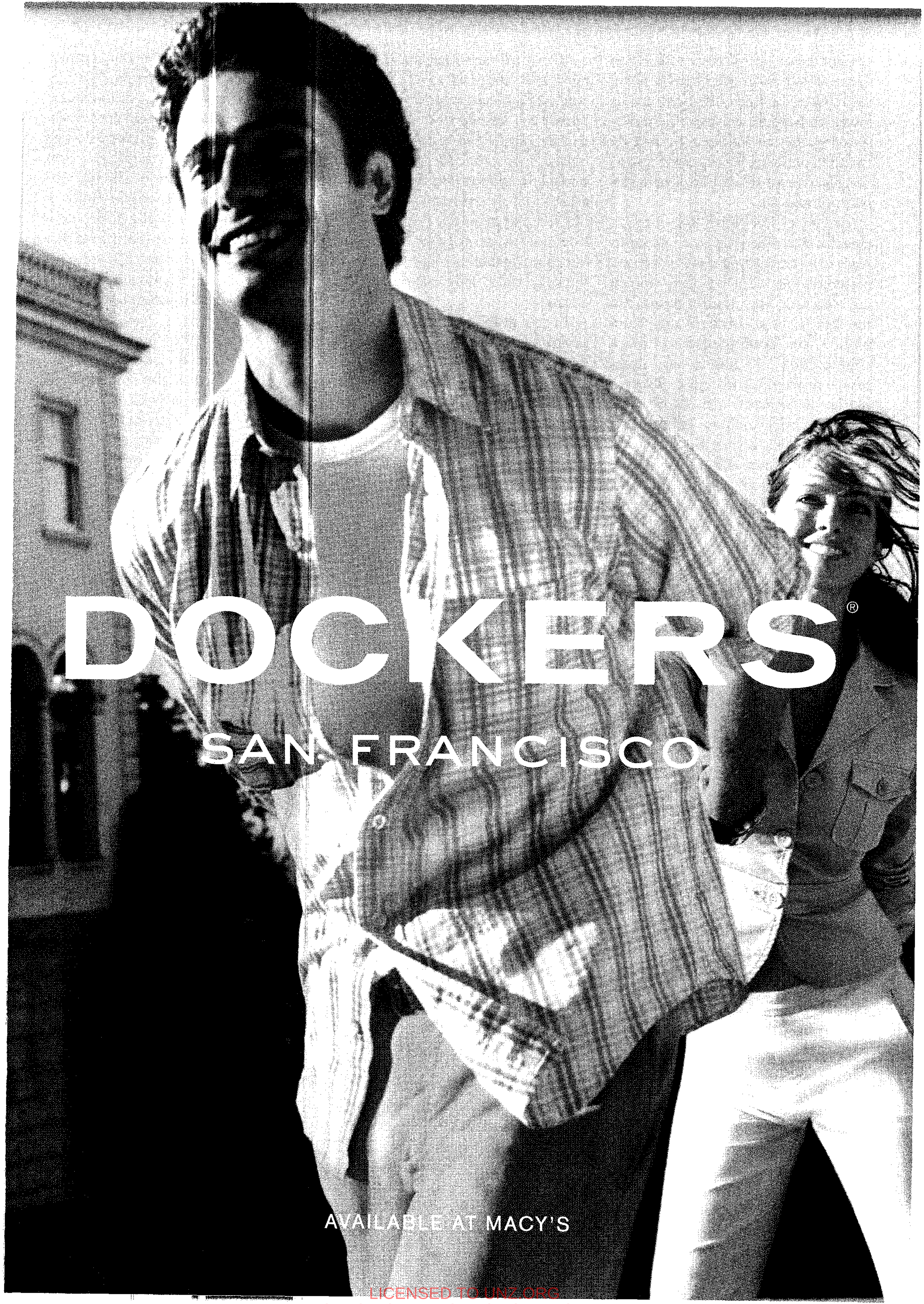
TOMER HANUKA

In a city where people dress not to look decent at work or at a party but to have a shot at the best-dressed list or *Us Weekly*, there is no such thing as an uncalculated look. Anybody who is anybody has a stylist to help her get dressed. Anybody who's nobody can shop at Intuition (10581 West Pico Boulevard). "We're about helping you get what the celebrities have," Jaye Hersh, the owner, says, as she demonstrates how to use her Web site to discover which thermal leggings and top the actress Mischa Barton wears (Primp Pony; $117 for the set).

On Robertson, the sidewalk is jammed with pairs of women with long straight blond hair, all of whom look like Bratz dolls grown up. They wear tight jeans and either flimsy camisoles or little tops by T-Bags or Juicy Couture. Owing to the differential of their stilettos, the women are all precisely the same height. Regulations appear to require that those taller than five feet eleven wear flat thong sandals by Bernardo. The women seem to be shopping for items identical to those they are wearing.

A few doors from Kitson is Les Habitudes (101 North Robertson), a spacious loft with columns. Exquisite European gowns of multilayered embroidered lace and hand-applied crystal beads seem to hang from the air. An elegant dress of silk tulle by the French designer Marc Le Bihan has hand-rolled seams and raw edges ($2,895), and a wedding gown, also by Le Bihan, drags a ten-foot silk-organza train (in the $5,000 range). To complete the look, you can pick up a pair of thigh-high white satin boots. And Les Habitudes sells jewelled tiaras, too. Is there any other kind?

On the way to put money in the meter, I sidle past a clutch of girls standing outside of Lisa Kline (136 South Robertson). Each is talking on her cell phone, chewing gum, and drinking juice. They wear aggressively short flared skirts and cashmere hoodies that match the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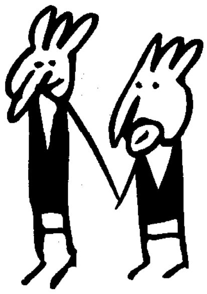
color of their Uggs. These are the Elves. I have seen them in other parts of town, too. Unlike the Bratz, the Elves are allowed to have brown hair. Generally speaking, they are in their teens or early twenties, but don't be surprised if, occasionally, you see an old Elf. Aghast, yes, but surprised, no.

At Curve (154 North Robertson), a cheerful spot where the sales assistants seem to be on hugging terms with every customer, four with-it-looking women are searching for an outfit to wear to the deli. "How about this?" a platinum blonde says, holding up a lacy black chiffon thing. "Black is no way," says a bronzed woman with loose, flowing, matching bronzed curls. I, who am dressed in black and have little skin exposed, suddenly feel like the character of Death in an Ingmar Bergman movie, but instead of playing chess I am trying on a groovy necklace made of large chunks of broken mirror glass ($1,350). The women, I later learn, are stylists, on assignment to assemble the wardrobe for a Pepsi commercial.

A couple of hours pass, and, as far as I know, I have seen no celebrities. However, at Diavolina (156 South Robertson), where the décor—white studded walls, plush leopard-print rug, a nude gold statue—suggests a den of vice, a salesgirl named Kiley points out, with no prompting, a pair of silver Christian Lacroix heels with a peep toe and rhinestone studs that Paris Hilton recently bought for $655. And, back at Kitson, as I eavesdrop on the security guard discussing his diet with a few of the sales associates, I come upon a line of cashmere sweaters featuring the monkey star Curious George. A purple hoodie of George waving goodbye to a bunny is $365.



I decide to go somewhere far away from the klieg lights—a place where, say, someone from the netherworld who is wearing boot-cut jeans might fit in. I head to Silver Lake and Echo Park, two adjacent hipster neighborhoods northeast of Hollywood. Or is it northwest?

"You have left the route," a firm, slightly muffled, and annoyingly insistent voice says. "A new route is being prepared."

"Don't tell me this again," I say, because I am at my wit's end. You could even say that I am past my wit's end, because I am talking to the Avis Assist tracking device. I am wishing that I had rented a car from Hertz, because it would be equipped with the Hertz NeverLost global positioning system, not the Avis (apparently) AlwaysAstray. I did not, incidentally, leave the route, but that squabble is between me and the voice that I have come to call the Tyrant.

Locals always insist that it's easy to navigate around L.A. "All you have to know is that the ocean is west," they say. "But how do I know where the ocean is?" I ask. "It's west," they say. I won't even start on the mountains.

"Veer right onto Rowena Avenue," the Tyrant says. "Don't tell me how to run my life," I feel like saying.

Eventually, the Tyrant gets me to Silver Lake, an enclave that has a poky suburban-hippie feel to it. At Rockaway Records (2395 Glendale Boulevard), a somewhat down-at-heel hangout, there is an ample stock of used and new CDs, vinyls, and DVDs, but I am more interested in the collectibles displayed in the smudgy glass cases. Someone, but not I, would kill to have a 1969 birth announcement of Cher's first baby, autographed and inscribed by the proud mother ($250). Same goes for a Bob Seger promotional fire extinguisher from 1991 ($50) and a 1968 Beatles Yellow Submarine watch—"no watchband, working but not accurate" ($750).

Across the street is Panty Raid (2378½ Glendale Boulevard), a sophisticated yet adorable lingerie store that the owner, Jen Abercrombie, tells me caters to the women of Silver Lake—"not trashy or risqué, but not frumpy, either." I understand "not frumpy," but the other two nots don't sound as if they'd be a selling point in the city that boasts Frederick's of Hollywood (6751 Hollywood Boulevard) and Trashy Lingerie, where you have to pay two dollars just to walk in the door (402 North La Cienega Boulevard).

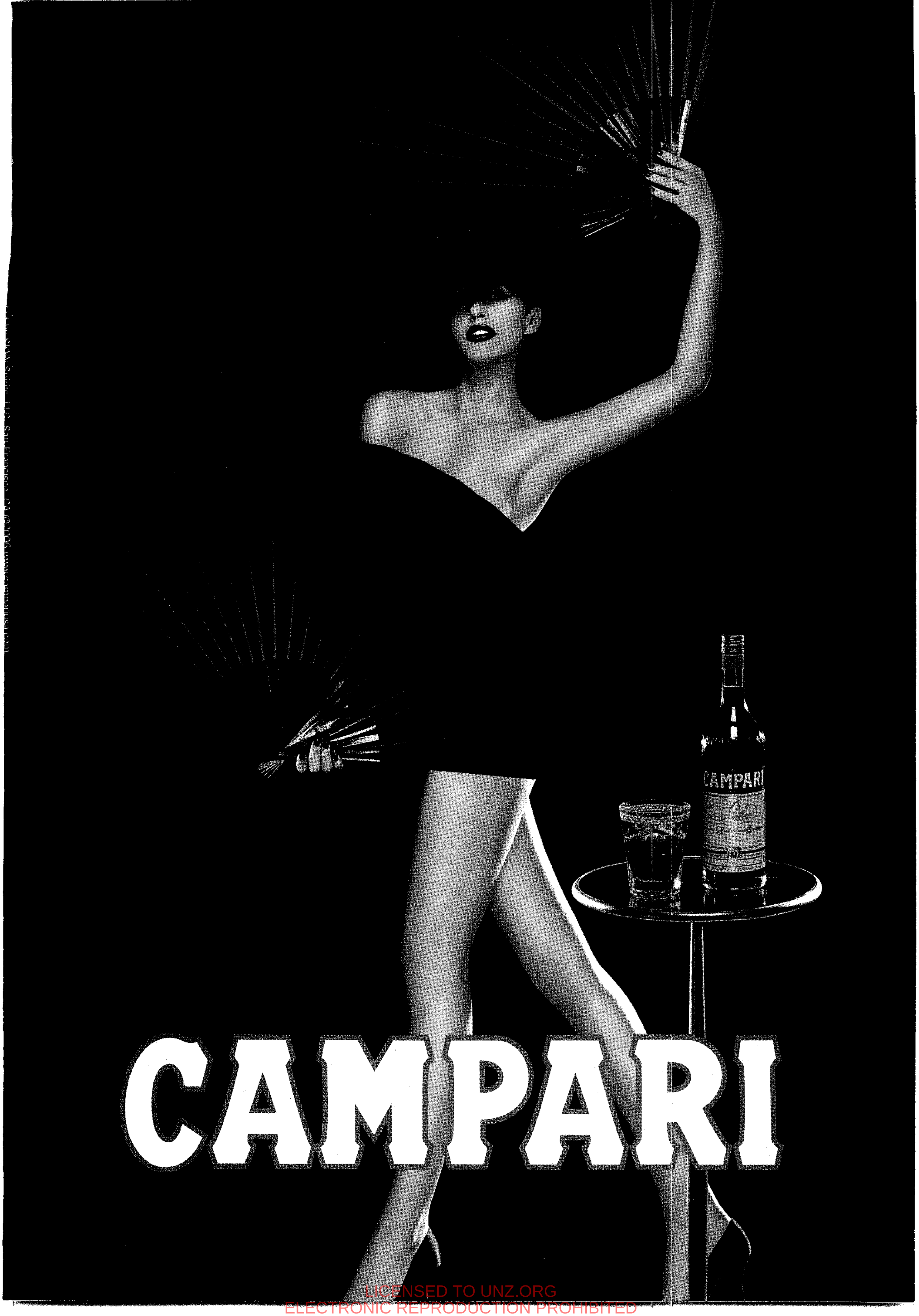
"Can you get the smell of this?" asks Carla Helmholz, one of the two women who own Patty Faye (2910 Rowena Avenue), a homey clothing shop that prides itself on being a part of the community—promoting neighborhood designers, donating money to schools, and making sure that dogs who need rescuing are rescued. Carla is holding a flowing steel-gray skirt to my nose. The skirt ($363) is part of a prewashed line of cashmere knits by Kristensen du Nord, of Denmark. It is beautifully made and it comes with a simple top ($218), and they both smell like Bounce fabric softener. It's a nice change from the other stores in Silver Lake, which all smell of aromatherapy candles.

After Silver Lake, I hurry off to Echo Park before I can no longer afford anything there. The original center of the film industry (Gloria Swanson was a resident), Echo Park today has a large Latino population and a fast-growing arty crowd. It is one of those rare parched areas where you can walk several blocks before finding a Starbucks.

Rest assured: there is caffeine at Chango Coffee House. Ahead of me in line is a woman in her late twenties who is wearing a little bit of everything: ripped-up and resewn vintage cashmere; a cotton tank top; a Balenciaga jacket; embroidered jeans; and a sheer skirt. Her hair looks undone, to say the least. If there weren't three carbon copies of her nearby, you'd swear she had just run out of a burning building after hastily throwing on as many of her heirlooms as possible. Call these girls the Drip Paintings. Their look may appear accidental, but it is the result of excruciating attention.

Around the corner I find Sirens & Sailors (1104 Mohawk Street), a wooden bungalow where there are some items by up-and-coming designers which would start a conversation, or maybe end one—for instance, a pair of Malicious Designs panties cut from a sweet floral cotton fabric and stamped with a gigantic skull ($30). A pale-green corduroy overcoat with velvet trim and brass buttons ($130) looks like the coat that Miuccia Prada might have designed had she been doing the uniforms for the Minutemen during the Revolutionary War. A tartan scarf with a blue bunny stencilled on it ($45) would make a terrific gift, but I'm less sure about the leather spats trimmed with polka-dot grosgrain ribbon ($38).

Near the entrance to the tiny boutique Luxe de Ville (2157 West Sunset Boulevard) stands a mannequin of a young boy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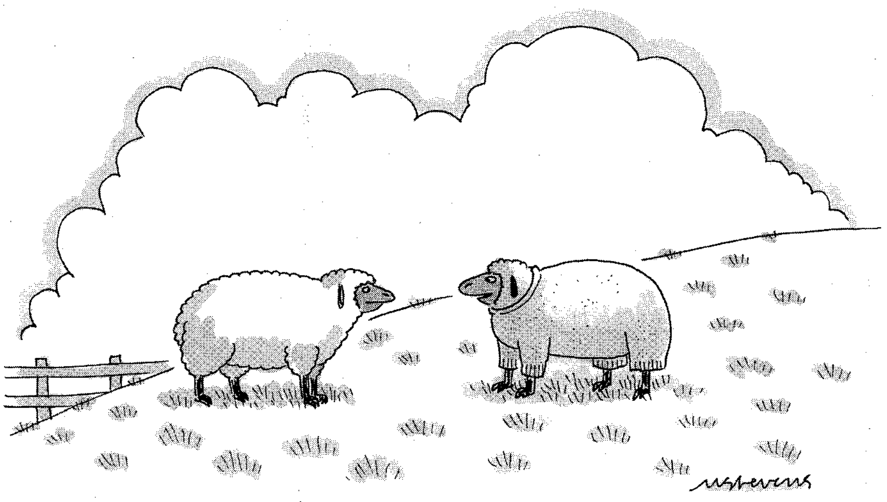

"I had my coat made into a sweater."

• •

who seems cheerful, considering that he's missing an arm. He is naked save for a jockey cap, a navy leather bikini brief with a big brass brooch, and strands of beads around his neck. The boy fits right in with the merchandise, a curious mixture of old and new: green plaid men's slacks from the forties; an I. Magnin black velvet hat with a marine-blue feather, circa 1945; a new moss-green velour dress that looks so complicated I can't imagine how one would put it on (a label inside says, "Sometimes catastrophes become trophies"). It's easy to imagine the cheerful boy mannequin wearing any of these pieces. But what about me? It's time I bought something, and this is what I choose: a short black leather skirt with black ruffles at the hem and two pockets ($85). The pockets are made of clear vinyl, and through them you can see insets of beige cotton decorated with colorful cartoon drawings of dolls in their underwear. The skirt was designed by the owner. His line is called O.D.D., which can't be argued with.

As I drive aimlessly through the woods of Griffith Park, allow me to stray farther from the prepared route and summarize Los Angeles fashion in three words: jeans, Lindsay Lohan–Paris Hilton–Nicole Richie (which I'm counting as one word), and vintage.

Vintage is so highly prized in this town that the word is thrown around to describe everything except, I'm guessing, one's physical self. Items that were made approximately tomorrow are said to be "vintage style," "vintage distressed," "vintage with a twist." Of course, there is plenty of bona-fide vintage around, too—offbeat bags and blouses to jazz up your everyday clothes, as well as couture to guarantee that you look like nobody else at the ball, except possibly your grandmother. We will get to vintage by and by (the longer we wait, the more vintagey it gets), but hold on. Are you thirsty?

Galco's Soda Pop Stop (5702 York Boulevard), which carries five hundred kinds of soda—not to mention four hundred and twenty-five beers and sixty brands of water—is out of the way, but so, by now, am I. The owner, John Nese, a burly guy in shorts and a golf shirt, shows me around the ten-thousand-square-foot room, which is filled with bottles. "Do you like hot ginger?" he asks, handing over a sample of Jamaica's Finest. "You like mint? We've got Plantation Style Mint Julep. They say it's good for people on chemo. This one—it's Japanese—was voted 'Most Fun to Drink,' because of the marble in the neck of the bottle. Not a lot of flavor, though. A woman came all the way from England to buy some, because, since 9/11, you can't ship soda overseas. It's considered an explosive."

"Make a sharp left onto Eagle Rock Boulevard," the Tyrant says. Do you know what several dozen bottles breaking in the back seat sounds like?

Anyway, vintage. Decades (8214½ Melrose Avenue) "is about the red carpet in every woman's life," the owner, a dashing man named Cameron Silver, says, "no matter if you're a celebrity or a deb in Atlanta." I am neither, but, still, who could resist gawking at the Gilbert Adrian tobacco velvet dress with a skirt of iridescent brocade and jet beading, circa 1940 ($6,500), and the intricately pleated Carven couture gown in an amazing mocha color with a square neckline and wide chiffon straps, circa late forties or early fifties ($6,500)?

Yet another glorious day. The burst of morning sunshine is beginning to feel like a slap in the face. Rays of light seem to penetrate every surface, leaving nothing hidden. Here there is no inside; it's all hanging out. No bundling up to protect oneself from the elements, no need to close the shop doors, no reason to conceal your underwear or, for that matter, your inner life. In New York your apartment is out of sight to all but those who are invited in; in Los Angeles your house is on view to anyone who drives by. In New York you get from here to there via subways, buses, and taxis that reveal little about who you are; in Los Angeles you're known by the car you drive ("If you're driving a Boxster instead of a Carrera," a friend says, "it's as if you're wearing a designer's bridge line"). Los Angeles is the transparent society.

But I, who am not from here, button my sombre blazer and out-of-fashion pants and hope the Tyrant will be so good as to guide me to Maxfield's (8825 Melrose Avenue), a store that has—oh, happy days!—a parking lot, the equivalent of a free summer house for my car.

It could be argued that the exterior of Maxfield's—a stark concrete cube—has an Asian feel. Or you could say that it looks like a prison. This is the store that brought the collection of Yohji Yamamoto to Los Angeles (someone had to, didn't they?). Amid the racks of clothes and stuff—a pair of deconstructed Galliano cargo pants for men ($1,535), a white appliquéd Prada skirt with bugle beads ($3,130), a bristle brush shaped like a cross ($135)—there are oddball artifacts that are mostly not for sale. A display of birds, most likely from the chicken family, are dressed for a night out. A lineup of shrunken heads from the Amazon, some

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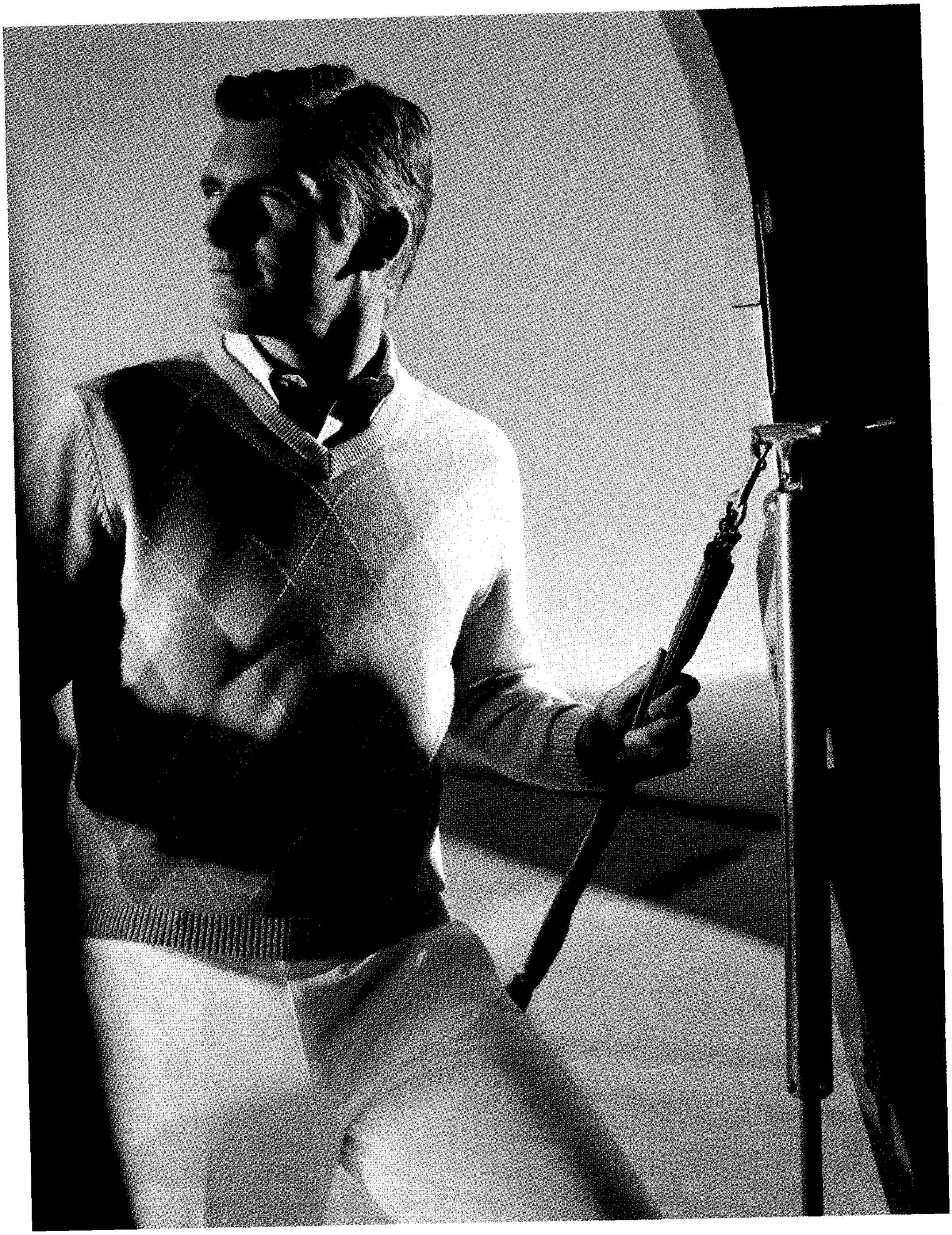

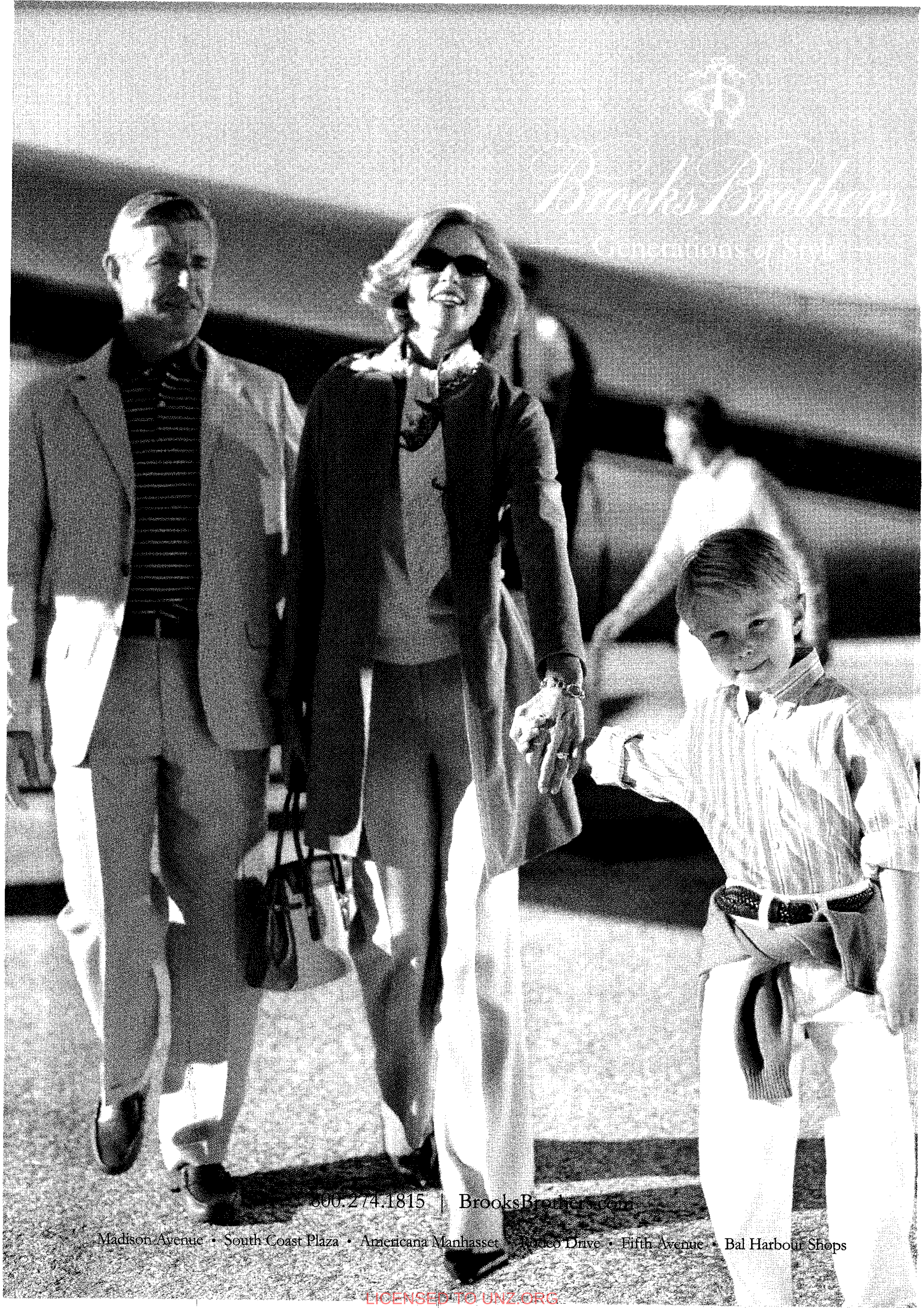
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as small as four inches, will, I'd venture to say, be staying in for a while. Maxfield's is known for its excellent vintage Hermès—clocks, jewelry, tableware, ashtrays. But enough with the old!

Fred Segal (8100 Melrose) is a store that boasts not just a parking lot but also a restaurant, where ladies go to show off their new bags. "The best thing about Fred Segal's," a friend says, "is that you can sip on your fruit slushee as you shop." After being informed by a salesgirl that Salma Hayek is in the store, I wander through the series of adjoining ivy-covered bungalows, looking at jeans, Juicy Couture, beauty products, and an endless array of slip dresses, about which the best thing I can say is that they would pack well. In the shoe department, I notice two Elves. "Look, look!" Elf No. 1 says, holding up a pair of fleece-lined boots. "They're so foul! So winter!" says Elf No. 2.

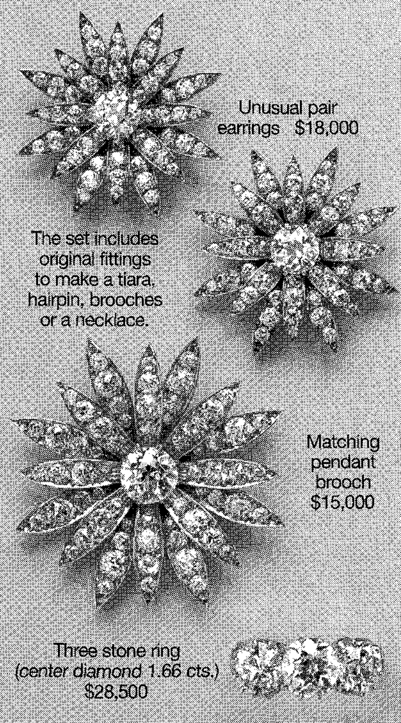
It must be mentioned that Soolip Paperie & Press (8646 Melrose) stocks uncommon decorative papers. My favorite is a wheat-colored vellum with pink hand-stitching; if wrapping paper could talk, this one would tell the story of a bunch of fuzzy caterpillars that have lost their way on a journey from the East to the West (and guess who can relate). The paper is $17 a sheet and also comes in mauve with magenta stitching.

We'll skip the Beverly Center, unless you're in the mood for an eight-story, eight-acre mall with neon escalators, but I can't miss the vicinity of Beverly Boulevard and Third Street. This is the neighborhood for the most exciting and inventive designs, things made locally and abroad, things I see nowhere else: A long muslin pleated wrap dress with distressed leather straps fastened with rusty nails ($529 at Aero & Co., 8403 West Third). A Belgian black suède bag with a Deco timepiece on the enclosure ($86 at Polkadots & Moonbeams Vintage, 8367 West Third). Change purses made from nineteen-sixties plastic pillows ($10-$16 at Plastica, 8405 West Third). Sets of resin-backed photographs of a Tokyo memorial to aborted and miscarried children ($475 at Zipper, 8316 West Third). A Chanel-like belted houndstooth trenchcoat for a dog ($85 at Puppies & Babies, 8363 West Third). Zippy party dresses by a designer from the Dominican Republic named José Ramón Reyes, which, as Hillary Rush, the shop's owner, says, are "so beautiful it's retarded!" ($400-$600 range at Hillary Rush, 8222 West Third). A rug made from loops of bicycle-tire rubber ($895 at Plushpod, 8211 West Third).

The moment I duck through the back-alley entrance at Naked (181 North Martel Avenue) and come upon a mannequin outfitted in nothing but a merkin as she plays pinball, I am enchanted. There is so much to flip over in this futuristic little loft: A short black Bettina Hubby dress with a hole in the shoulder, cotton gauze insets down the front, and a giant eagle on the back ($350). Magnet-closure necklaces that look like garter belts ($110). Jodhpurs with mesh panels, providing a peek of inner thigh ($340). A pea-green pigskin bag trimmed in white crocodile with a sparkly gold zipper, which looks as if it had been thrown into the washing machine ($500). A black coachman's coat with tails on the side made by the Society for Rational Dress ($380).

Most shops close at seven, so there's still time to mill around on Rodeo Drive, which is neither a rodeo nor, considering the traffic, a drive. What it is is three blocks of expensive shops that you have seen elsewhere (Gucci, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, etc.), plus a little mall with fountains, Corinthian columns, Spanish steps, and wrought-iron street lamps. This is the best place to find Angelenos trying to be Europeans, Europeans trying to be Angelenos, and Asians trying to spend money. I walk behind a man wearing a Pierre Cardin belt and a woman wearing pants that fit like a glove. The difference in their age is about forty years, and you don't need me to tell you which is older. In front of Tiffany's, the man says, "That was the best lawsuit I've ever been in."

"Avis device service suspended," reads the Tyrant's tiny screen as I head back to the hotel. "Be that way," I say, and look for a human being to ask for directions. I get exactly what I need from a dapper Beverly Hills cop, who is wearing a B.H.P.D.-issue woven leather belt—so much snappier, don't you agree, than the humdrum black model issued by the New York Police Department. ♦



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SHOUTS & MURMURS

IDEAS FOR PAINTINGS

BY JACK HANDEY

Because I love art, I am offering the following ideas for paintings to all struggling artists out there. Some of those artists may be thinking, Hey, I've got good ideas of my own. Really? Then why are you struggling?

These ideas are free of charge. All I ask is that when you have completed a painting, as a courtesy to me you sign it "Jack Handey and [your name or initials]." And, if the painting is sold, I get approximately all the money.

Good luck! Let's get painting!

Stampede of Nudes

The trouble with most paintings of nudes is that there isn't enough nudity. It's usually just one woman lying there, and you're looking around going, "Aren't there any more nudes?" This idea solves that.

What has frightened these nudes? Is it the lightning in the background? Or did one of the nudes just spook? You don't know, and this creates tension.

Made You Look

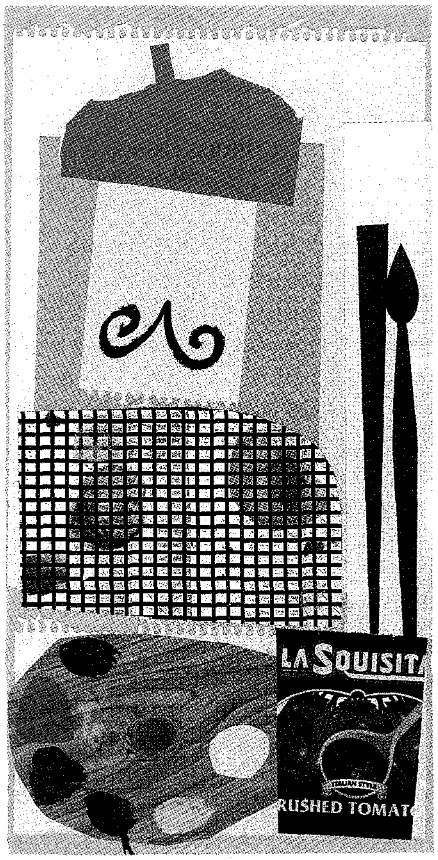
This idea is difficult to execute, but could turn out to be a masterpiece. It depicts a grandly dressed lady looking straight at you. At first, her look seems to say, "Quick, look behind you!" So you turn around, and when you look at her again her expression now seems to be one of smug satisfaction.

The Bleak Hotel

A man is staring out the window of a bleak hotel room. He looks depressed. From the side, flying through the air, is a football. And you realize, If he's depressed now, just wait until he gets hit in the head by that football.

The Repentant Cameron Diaz

Cameron Diaz, her tear-streaked face lit by a candle, gazes wistfully at a photograph of me.



The Weary Peasants

Some tired-looking peasants are walking down a road at sunset, carrying sheaves of wheat. A nobleman in a fancy coach is coming up from behind. This creates drama, because you're thinking, Why don't those peasants get out of the way?

Self-Portrait with Startled Expression

The key here is to be able to constantly startle yourself as you're painting. One option is to hire a professional startler, but that can get expensive. (The best ones are from Ireland.) Be sure to use opening the bill from your startler as a free startle.

The Death of Hercules

An old Hercules is being lifted into the air by angels. On the one hand, it makes you sad, but on the other you think, He's still in pretty good shape.

Abstract White No. 1

This is a solid-white painting. You might be asking, "Is it O.K. to put in a fleck of color here and there?" I give up. Do whatever you want.

The Boxers

Two boxers are whaling away at each other in a boxing ring. But then you notice that the people in the audience are also fighting one another. And it makes you ask: Who are the truly barbaric ones here, the boxers or the spectators? Then you can turn the painting over and read the answer: "the boxers."

The French Lovers

A French dandy is embracing his beautiful buxom lover in a lush, overgrown garden. This painting should be in the shape of binoculars.

Still-Life with Rabbit

A wooden table is chockablock with fruit, cheese, and a glass of wine. To one side is a dead rabbit, a dead pheasant, and a dead eel. And you're thinking, Thanks for the fruit, but, man, take better care of your pets.

Still-Life with Beets, Cauliflower, Liver, and Large Glass of Beer

Just kidding. Only the beer.

The Expulsion of Adam and Eve

Biblical themes sell well. In this one, God hovers over Adam and Eve, kicking them out of the Garden of Eden. As they leave, in an aside to Eve, Adam imitates the expression on God's face.

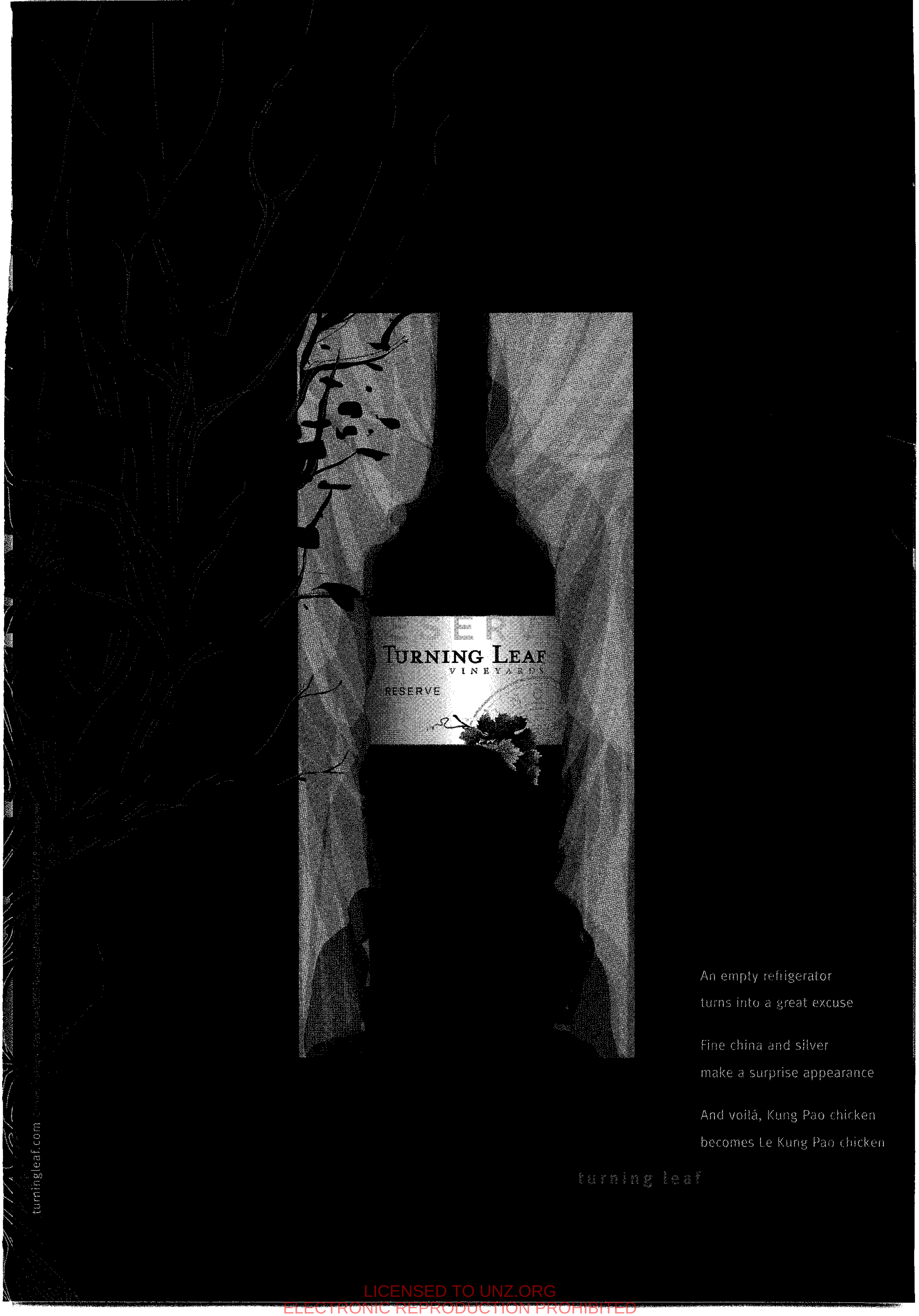
The Jolly Dancer

The scene is a flatboat on the Ohio River. A frontiersman who looks like me is doing his funny cowboy dance. Everyone seems to be enjoying the dance except for an insane simpleton who looks like my so-called friend Don. Crawling up behind Don is a big snapping turtle.

Untitled

This can pretty much be anything. Just remember to make it good, and to put my name on it. ♦

LAURIE ROSENWALD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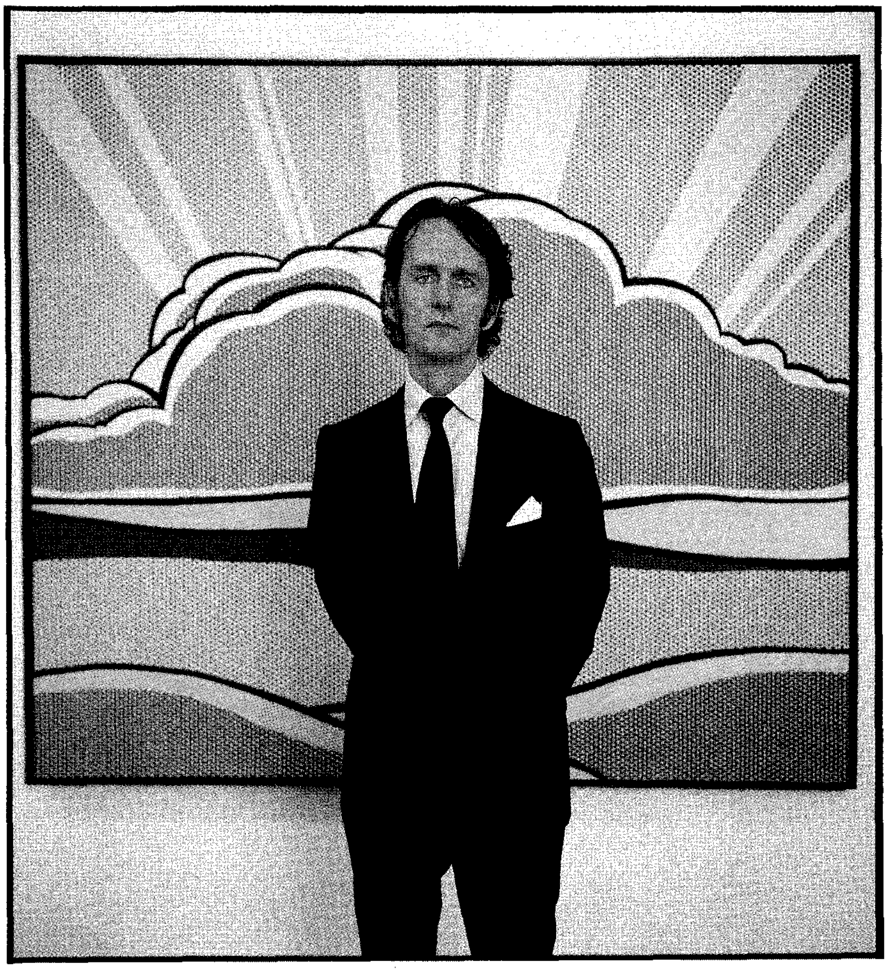
ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE ALCHEMIST

Tobias Meyer and the art of the auction.

BY JOHN COLAPINTO

Not long ago, Tobias Meyer, the chief auctioneer and worldwide head of contemporary art at Sotheby's, visited the Robert Rauschenberg exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum. He was there to look at a painting that was, potentially, in play for a private sale, and he wanted to inspect it closely, since, as he puts it, "these paintings really only come alive when you stand in front of them." Meyer arrived at the Met with his right arm in a sling, the result of a weekend ice-skating mishap that had left him in some pain. Even in this condition, Meyer, when he walked into the entrance rotunda, caused heads to turn. Tall, slim, and with an erect carriage, he has longish, wavy hair, which he wears swept back from his high forehead. His eyes are a transparent blue, his chin delicate, and although he is forty-three years old, he looks at least ten years younger. His clothes are custom-made, by a retired Savile Row tailor, and he was dressed casually, but impeccably, in a moss-green sports jacket with yellow windowpane check and mustard-colored corduroys of a wale so fine that I initially mistook the fabric for velvet. A blue-and-white polka-dot scarf was loosely knotted around his neck.


Meyer says that his job is "to make art expensive." Photograph by Steve Pyke.

Meyer's stylishness and physical beauty are legendary in art and design circles, and can reduce even experts on such matters to near-incoherence. His friend Tom Ford, the former creative director of Gucci, says of Meyer, "If Tobias was naked, he'd be stylish; it's not just his clothes. It's that *face*. And the shape of his head, his nose, the way he stands—the way his chin is slightly up in the air—he has the most amazing posture; he's just so *great* looking, really sculptural. And that voice. You have to talk about the voice!" Meyer, whose Old World propriety forbids him any display of ego, shakes his head dismissively at such praise, as if to say that the virtues Ford extolls are mere trade details. "That's physical presence—which you need as an auctioneer," he says in a voice that is indeed remarkable, a resonant baritone lightly accented with his native German. (He's also fluent in French, has a good grasp of Italian, and speaks perfect English.) "To live under the gaze of twelve hundred people and not buckle under the attention, you need to sit in your own body and use your voice that way."

As we mounted the Met's central stairway to the Rauschenberg show, Meyer suggested a quick detour. He veered right, into a gallery of paintings by Antonello da Messina. Though his job at Sotheby's is to acquire and auction contemporary art, he is also an authority on Renaissance and rococo art, gilt bronzes, antique French furniture, German porcelain, French illuminated manuscripts, and countless other man-made objects. "He's a real connoisseur," his close friend the painter John Currin says. "That's actually not as common as you might think in the art world. He, more than almost anybody I know, is a real aesthete." Meyer's taste, expertise, and knowledge of the art market have earned him the trust of some of the most important art collectors, among them the music and movie mogul David Geffen. "If I have something that I want to sell, I usually call Tobias and ask him what he thinks the market is," Geffen told me. "Invariably, in my experience, whenever I've sold anything with Tobias he's been pretty much on the money."

In the Antonello gallery, Meyer walked over to an Annunciation on the far wall and explained that the painting was rare in that it depicted only the Virgin Mary, and not the announcing angel. "You, as a viewer, are put in the position of Gabriel, who comes to tell her of the miraculous birth," Meyer said. He stopped in front of the painting, which was made in about 1475 and is not much larger than a page of this magazine. Mary gazes out, past the viewer, her left hand holding her blue robe closed in what Meyer pointed out was a "protective" gesture. "Because you are a stranger," he said. Then he fell silent. Something about his focussed presence facilitated a deeper absorption in the work, a greater attention to its delicacy, its quiet grace, and its reserves of understated emotion. I could not recall being so moved by a painting. Only when I turned from the canvas did he smile at me and say, with an arched eyebrow, "Amazing, no?"

Later, I learned that my experience with Meyer in front of the Antonello was by no means unusual. The best auction professionals are distinguished by their ability to create such frissons in people in the presence of art. Bill Ruprecht, the C.E.O. of Sotheby's, says, "People make the mistake of describing our business as being about objects. It's not. I think we handle the interaction between people and objects. The cliché in the auction world is: 'We bring objects alive.'" Meyer puts it slightly differently. "What I love to do is put people in front of art and make them feel it, make them stop everything else they're doing and experience it, deeply," he says. "That's how I make art expensive. And that's my job, for the company and for my clients. To make art expensive."

Even at a time when the contemporary-art market is booming, Meyer has become famous for making works created since the end of the Second World War more expensive than ever. In May of 1998, shortly after he began his current job at Sotheby's in New York, Meyer sold Andy Warhol's "Orange Marilyn" for seventeen million dollars, a record price at auction for a Warhol. Last year, he set a record for contemporary art with David Smith's "Cubi XXVIII," which sold for almost twenty-four million, and he also set a world record for the most expensive art work ever sold at auction, when, in May of 2004, he brought the hammer down on Picasso's 1905 painting "Boy with Pipe" for a hundred and four million dollars.

But Meyer is also a tastemaker, whose personal style and mode of living are an index to, and catalyst for, certain shifts that have lately taken place in the art world. "A lot of the art-dealing in masterworks years ago was a very stuffy affair, and going to the auction was not a stylish event," Jeffrey Deitch, the New York dealer, who handled some private sales for Sotheby's for several years beginning in the late nineties, says. "Tobias is in the forefront of a trend to add style and glamour to this whole area. He's a master of being simultaneously uptown and downtown, European and American, more classic and elegant but also with a bit of a raffish edge. So he embodies a lot of what you seek in the most exciting contemporary art."

Meyer's departure from tradition is reflected in his choice of where and how to live. He and his partner of nine years, Mark Fletcher, who is an adviser to collectors of emerging young artists, moved last year from a building on the Upper East Side to the new Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle, a tower of gleaming glass and steel that might be seen by some in the art world as impossibly vulgar. The foyer of their apartment, on the sixty-sixth floor, is sheathed in unpainted plywood and contains an eighteenth-century German neoclassical table whose front edge bears a gilt wood satyr head, an image echoed, on the wall above, by a framed photograph of the artist Matthew Barney in satyr horns. The living-room walls and ceiling are covered with wallpaper designed by a young Brazilian artist who calls himself Assume Vivid Astro Focus, and it features, among a jumble of amoebic color patterns and spiky vegetation, a larger-than-life-size naked male with tattooed belly and pierced nipples. The floor is blanketed in black-and-white-striped broadloom. On one wall, a small painting of a girl's head by Currin is surrounded by a massive Baroque frame of exploding acanthus leaves; on another hangs a gigantic Warhol silk screen of a pistol. Leaning against a third wall is a huge dollar sign studded with light bulbs, by Tim Noble and Sue Webster. ("Truth in America," Meyer said, of the naked man, the dollar sign, and the gun. "Sex, money, and violence.") Amid all this is an elegant grouping of eighteenth-century French marquise chairs. The apartment is a bizarrely eclectic mix whose contents should not work together but so manifestly do so that to stand in it for any length of time is to begin to rebuke oneself for the conven-

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tionality of one's own taste. When Currin saw the pair of stupendously ornate German rococo fire-gilt candelabras which sit on the table in Meyer's foyer, he was initially taken aback. "He bought a couple of candlesticks for a ton of money," Currin said. "At first, I thought he was crazy. Then I was looking at them, and I thought they were *incredible*. Made me really want to have a rococo candlestick." As Deitch puts it, "There are a lot of people who make their living in the field, who are professional, who keep things moving along. It's very rare for people to open it up and take it into a bigger place. Tobias is one of the people who make art bigger."

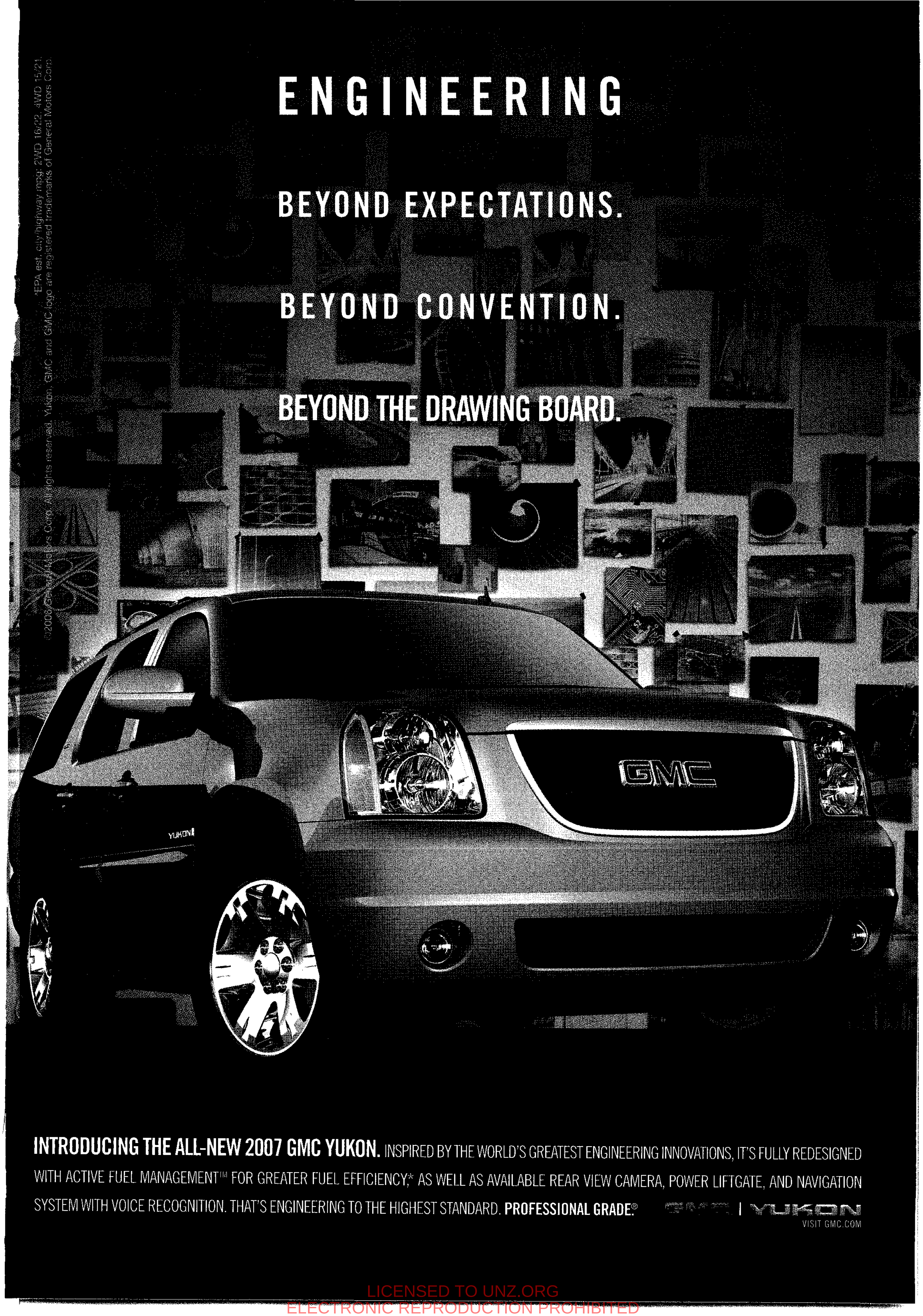
Meyer was born near Frankfurt, the younger of two boys, and spent his childhood in Germany; when he was fourteen, his family settled in Vienna. His father, Ernst, had grown up poor in Hamburg, but became wealthy as a research scientist who worked with synthetic fabrics. Meyer attributes his early interest in art to his mother, Lore, who died in 2002, of cancer. "She went to art school, she did paint herself, and she talked about Matisse to me very early on," he said. "She took me to art fairs, where I saw these early Cy Twomblys, and she had an amazing emotional eye. She would walk always toward the most emotional painting. She loved Yves Klein, Matisse, Miró, Picasso. We had a very close relationship."

In his teens, Meyer painted, but, tellingly for someone who would become an auctioneer, a profession that demands, above all else, a talent for looking, he attempted few original compositions. "I copied pictures," he said. "I did watercolors of Cézanne. I was very intrigued about how things were done." When Meyer was thirteen, he and his brother, Axel, who is now a scientist at Procter & Gamble, were sent to England for the summer, to improve their English. They boarded at private homes, through an agency called Universal Aunts. "It was a very proper thing," Meyer said. "My brother ended up with some brigadier's family, and I ended up in this kooky house that happened to belong to Maria LeBrock"—the mother of the actress Kelly (who later appeared in the mid-eighties movies "The Woman in Red" and "Weird Science"). Maria LeBrock had owned a gallery and was an avid auction-goer. "She was like my Auntie Mame," Meyer said. He spent five successive summers at LeBrock's house, where he pored over her copies of art and auction catalogues, committing to memory recondite details about each work's provenance and price. LeBrock encouraged his fascinations. "She'd send me to the Wallace Collection in London, and say, 'Tobias, go there and look at this,'" he recalled. The origin of his desire to look at beautiful things mystifies even him. "Maybe it was knowing that I was gay, and really wanting to look at boys, but not really looking at them," he said. When Meyer was fourteen, LeBrock took him to his first auction. He bid on, and won, a set of antique spoons for about fifteen pounds.

Meyer graduated from high school in 1981 and, at his father's suggestion, applied to a yearlong course run by Christie's in London. The course, then only a few years old, was conceived by Robert Cumming, an art historian, to train "the world's future auctioneers, art experts, dealers and consultants." Eighteen years old, and with only a high-school diploma, Meyer did not have the qualifications for the course (the other applicants had college degrees). "Technically, we shouldn't have interviewed him, but rules are made to be broken," Cumming said. "Partly, what was interesting about Tobias was that he seemed to be interested in things that a boy of eighteen wasn't normally interested in—like furniture and glass and tapestries." At the interview, applicants were presented, by a panel of Christie's experts, including Cumming, with several postcards depicting art objects, some well known, some obscure. "Most young people, because it's fairly alarming, pick on the things that are familiar—the Michelangelo, the Picasso—and they tell you what they've learned at school about those things," Cumming said. "Tobias was one of those rare people more fascinated by the things that he'd never seen before and which he knew nothing about than by the things which were familiar to him. He had an absolutely natural curiosity, and he was totally absorbed by what he was looking at. He had that really quite magical quality, even at the age of eighteen."

Meyer was admitted to the course. "It was like being liberated, because I could finally say things I wanted to talk about," he said. The following year, he enrolled at the University of Vienna, where he studied fifteenth-century book illuminations, Renaissance art, and nineteenth-century French painting. But he was not entirely comfortable in the academic world. "I thought art history in itself was too theoretical," he said. "I liked the idea of touching objects and being with them." He took a part-time job at a local antique shop, which was owned and run by a Polish immigrant named Czeslaw Bednarczyk, who had three daughters but no sons and who developed a paternal attachment to Meyer. "He was an amazing guy," Meyer says. "Very knowledgeable, very civilized, extremely elegant in a substantial way—beautiful shirts and very, very nice suits, but never flamboyant. He would say to me, 'Tobias, let's make money.' And we would go for walks through Vienna and find all these incredible things. He knew what they were, but the dealers didn't. We found bronze candelabras that were Paris 1745, but the dealers thought they were nineteenth-century copies." After six months, Bednarczyk sent Meyer, then just twenty, to the London auctions to buy objects for the shop.

Meyer graduated from the University of Vienna in 1988 and got a job at Christie's in London. "I spent three suicidal months as a graduate trainee in the clock department," he recalled. He successfully lobbied for a move into contemporary art, but remained frustrated. "I was in the basement, cataloguing mediocre paintings," he said. In 1992, he got a call from Lucy Mitchell-Innes, who was then the worldwide head of contemporary art at Sotheby's. She had heard about Meyer and invited him to meet her at a friend's flat on Cheyne Walk. "When you sit in a catalogue room going through paintings, you just build up an enormous memory bank of information," she told me. "And he was voracious for knowing all of the stuff. He's very bright and could verbalize about a market or the importance of a work, or the importance of an artist, or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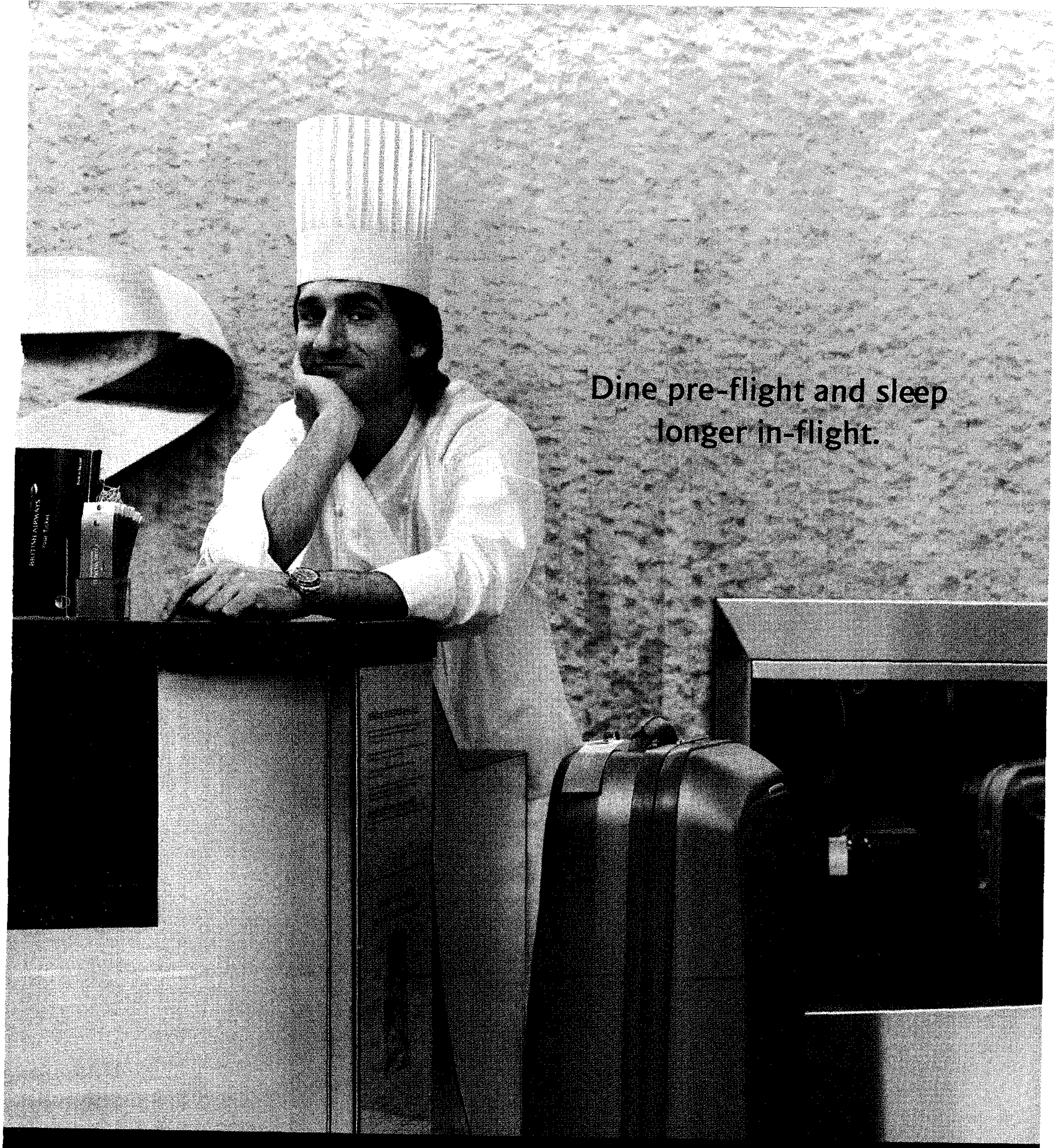
"Can you imagine what he would look like without money?"

how the visual or historical importance can translate into a market." Mitchell-Innes hired Meyer to be head of the contemporary-art department in London—one of the few times Sotheby's has poached someone from its rival. Not long after, Mitchell-Innes, a gifted auctioneer, approached Meyer about becoming an auctioneer himself. "The auctioneering part is something I never set out to do," Meyer says. Nevertheless, in March, 1992, when he was twenty-nine, he took up the gavel for the first time at a day sale of contemporary art in London and demonstrated that he had the steady nerves, wit, and physical stamina necessary to conduct a sale. In 1997, at the age of thirty-four, he was promoted to his current position as worldwide head of contemporary art. For his first auction in New York, in May, 1997, Meyer included several works by talented young artists who were not yet fixtures in the important evening sales—Matthew Barney, Kiki Smith, Rachel Whiteread. "The sale had a different feel about it than most of Sotheby's contemporary-art sales, and purposely so," Carol Vogel wrote in the *Times* the next day. "Mr. Meyer is clearly out to shake things up."

Meyer's office, on the seventh floor of Sotheby's New York headquarters, a blue-green glass building that spans an entire block of York Avenue, on the Upper East Side, is furnished in a spartan style: a single couch, a small antique table that serves as a desk, and three chairs. One morning in mid-December, a huge pink triptych by Francis Bacon, "Studies of the Human Body," was mounted on one wall. Meyer was selling the work, not at auction, for a collector who preferred the anonymity of a private sale. "We know four, six, fifteen people who would be interested in this painting," Meyer told me. "So we try to match buyer and seller." On his desk was a thick book on Roy Lichtenstein from which a single red Post-it note protruded. "It's a painting I've chased for a long time," Meyer said. "Four or five years." He chuckled. "Hunting has begun for the May auction season."

Meyer oversees a staff of thirty-three, based primarily in Europe and the United States, who aid him in the pursuit of art works; but unlike some auctioneers, whose jobs are limited to conducting sales from the rostrum, he also secures the art that goes on the block. The extreme pressure he feels to obtain six or seven brand-name masterpieces for each of the twice-yearly contemporary-art sales in New York, in May and November, is exacerbated by his knowledge that Christie's has the same objective—and is often going after the same paintings. The paranoia that this can induce was obvious when I asked Meyer to show me the painting in the Lichtenstein book. He apologized, but declined to identify the work; nor would he tell me who owned it. "But I'm trying to get it," he said. "Very much. And it's a great painting." Auction professionals will go to almost any length to snag art from a rival house; Meyer is no exception. He once intercepted a truck filled with crates of Bacons bound for Christie's, he told me. "They didn't get there." He shrugged. "But they would do the same."

Not all acquisitions are so dramatic. Meyer, and his competitors at Christie's, often find art as auctioneers have done since Sotheby's and Christie's were founded, in the middle of the eighteenth century, by keeping an ear out for what some auction people call "the three D's": divorce, debt, and death—human calamities that often compel collectors (or their survivors) to unload a few masterworks in exchange for cash. "I'm talking to lawyers and looking at transparencies, and it's a direct competition with Christie's, and it's all very hard-nosed," Meyer said. He prefers trickier acquisitions, since those typically reap the greatest financial rewards, and also because he relishes the complex blend of diplomacy, detective work, and seduction required. "I always say of Tobias that he's a hunter-gatherer, as opposed to a farmer," Bill Ruprecht, Sotheby's C.E.O., says. "He has ways of precipitating an acquisition when the phone hasn't rung." In one celebrated instance, Meyer identified the whereabouts of an early Gerhard Richter painting by noting the name of the owner in Richter's catalogue raisonné. He then wrote to everyone with the same last name in the Düsseldorf phone book, and eventually found the owner: an upholsterer who had bought the painting in the nineteen-sixties from Richter, then a penniless neighbor, for two hundred dollars; Meyer persuaded the man to sell the painting at auction, where it went for three hundred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and fifty thousand dollars. But in today's overheated market for contemporary art such finds are increasingly rare, and auction professionals know where many of the treasures are: in the hands of a relatively small group of collectors who somehow must be persuaded to give up a favored work for auction. This was the case with the Lichtenstein that Meyer was after. I asked him whether Christie's was also in talks with the collector for the painting. "I always assume my competitor is on the case," he said.

In the late nineteen-eighties, Sotheby's began offering guarantees to consigners, which are payable even if the piece fails to sell at auction. Christie's soon followed suit. The practice carries substantial risk: if the piece "passes" at auction, the house is left owning a work that has acquired the stigma of a non-sale. But Meyer is famous for his fearlessness in issuing enormous guarantees for works that he is convinced he can sell for huge sums. For last May's evening sale in New York, Meyer was determined to secure a large Warhol silk screen of Elizabeth Taylor called red "Liz," one of a series. The painting's owner, Irving Blum, was on the verge of making a deal with Christie's when Meyer flew out to Los Angeles, where Blum lives, and offered him a guarantee of about ten million dollars. Blum consigned the work to Sotheby's. When the auction house announced that red "Liz" was estimated to sell for between nine and twelve million dollars, the art world was filled with talk of Meyer's hubris. "At first, he absolutely startled the world," said Robert Mnuchin, a veteran collector and former executive at Goldman Sachs, who now runs an art gallery in New York. "People thought he had overreached and it was too aggressive. And his view was: 'This is just such a special picture, you have to use a different measuring stick.' And you know what? He was right. There were several buyers for it, not one buyer—you could see that in the auction room." Meyer sold red "Liz" for $12.6 million. "I love taking risks," he says. "If you don't take risks, there is nothing to gain."

Over the ensuing weeks, I spoke with Meyer frequently about his progress with the Lichtenstein. "I'm getting close," he told me in early January. A few weeks later, he finally had the painting—and a signed contract—safely in his possession at Sotheby's, and he revealed to me that the work was Lichtenstein's "Sinking Sun" and that the owner was Joe Helman, a dealer and collector who, since the early sixties, has amassed a trove of paintings by artists from the Pop era, including Warhol and Jasper Johns. Meyer said he thought that "Sinking Sun" would bring twenty million at auction in May. "Possibly more," he said.

HELPING SARAH

And so with tuck and tightening of blouse
And vigorous advance of knee, she was young
Again as the year, out weeding rigs
In the same old skirt and brogues, on top of things
Every time she straightened. And a credit.

Her oatmeal tweed
With pinpoints of red haw and yellow whin,
Its threadbare workadayness hard and common;
Her quick step; her dry hand; all things well-sped;
Her open and closed relations with earth's work;
And everything passed on without a word.

—*Seamus Heaney*

In late January, Helman flew to New York from his estate in Italy to work with Meyer on the note for the auction catalogue. One afternoon in Meyer's office, Helman, a heavyset man in his sixties with a fierce expression and a Midwestern accent, was seated at one end of the sofa, and Meyer was seated at the other. On the wall beside them was mounted "Sinking Sun," a six-foot-by-seven-foot cartoonlike rendering of a sunset, with light rays shooting out from a bank of clouds and a single slice of red intersecting the canvas horizontally.

Helman wanted the catalogue note to emphasize that "Sinking Sun" was painted at a turning point in Lichtenstein's career, when he was making the transition from his famous comic-book style to a more Op-art look. Helman also had ideas about the meaning of the painting, which was made in 1964, after the assassination of President Kennedy.

"At a certain moment, America does a shift," Helman said. "Kennedy gets killed, and there's a setting sun, and a period of great optimism, post-World War II, comes to a very abrupt stop. And so the picture is a parallel to our culture, a metaphor for our culture, and it's a profound work of art. It's the real thing."

Meyer nodded. "And the scale," he said. "This large scale is rare for Lichtenstein, and makes it highly desirable."

Earlier, Meyer had told me that he began pursuing "Sinking Sun" in 2000, during a visit to Helman's home in New York.

"Tobias had asked about my putting up for auction a number of other paintings that I own," Helman said. "And I said no. But after a period of time I realized that I hadn't said no about 'Sinking Sun,' and we kept talking about it."

Meyer, who was leaning back against the sofa cushions, nodded.

"He's a very talented guy," Helman had said the previous day. "We'd been talking about the painting for a long time, and he's been diligent and persistent. And at a certain point I felt that he had come to share my understanding of the picture. This had nothing to do with money. This was really the fact that the guy got it. For me, the art counts. He said something to me that I thought was really interesting. He said he thought it was probably the best postwar American landscape in existence."

In early February, Meyer travelled to England to conduct an auction at Sotheby's London headquarters, on New Bond Street. Two days before the sale, the building's upstairs galleries were crowded with dealers and collectors previewing the works. Meyer was in the main showroom, talking to a small group of dealers. He seemed his usual unflappable self, but this was an illusion. In the days prior to a sale,

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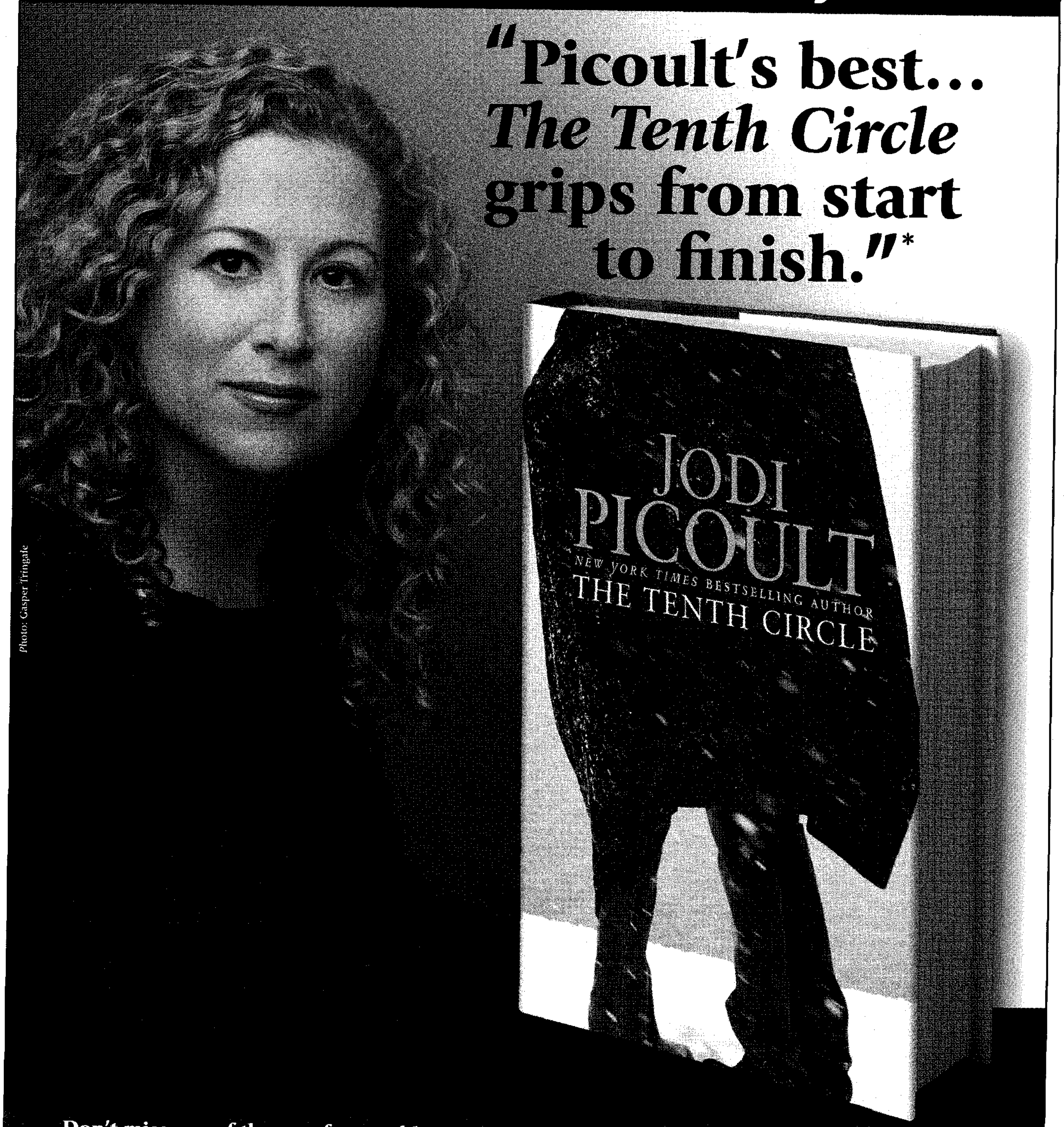
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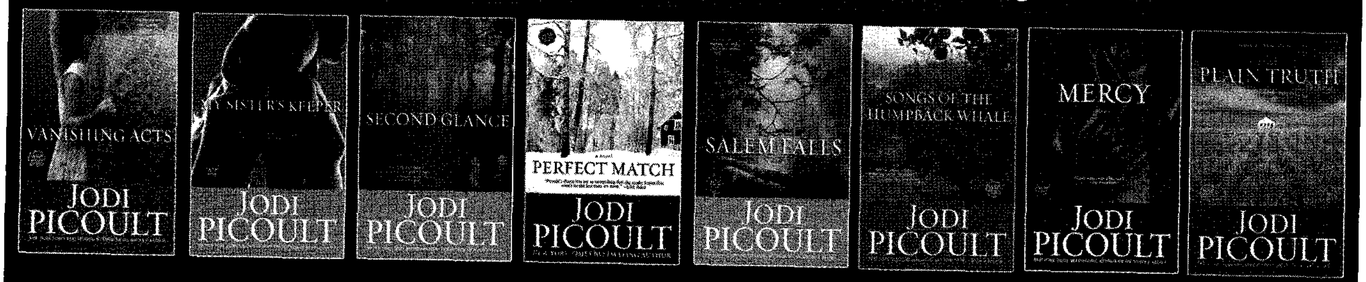
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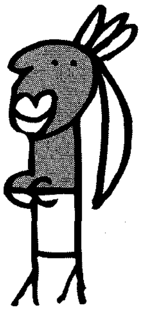
Meyer is, he says, "wound up like a top."

The group of collectors and dealers moved off, and Meyer removed a BlackBerry from the inside pocket of his jacket. He tapped out a message to a Sotheby's lawyer, urging him to finish a set of contracts for a consignment that he was waiting on. During the previous few weeks, he had been to China, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Aspen, and Paris, in search of works for Sotheby's May auction. Meyer's blue eyes were brightly kindled, and he was speaking faster than usual. His cell phone, whose ringtone sounds like singing birds, twittered. He spoke rapid-fire German into the phone, then closed it. "Someone interested in the Polke," he said, gesturing at a huge portrait of a fat man rendered in tiny black dots on white canvas. Of the fifty-six paintings and sculptures on view, Meyer thought that "Daffodils and Celery," a small, early painting by Lucian Freud, "should go through the roof," and he was sanguine about "Mao 7," a large Warhol. "But the painting of the week," he added, with some bitterness, "is a Bacon that's going on sale at Christie's tonight."



Sotheby's and Christie's always schedule their sale nights within a day or so of each other, since that's when collectors are in town. To Meyer's chagrin, Christie's had managed to win a consignment of contemporary British paintings that Meyer also had been after, including an acknowledged masterpiece: a 1969 self-portrait by Francis Bacon that the painter gave to his longtime assistant, Valerie Beston. She had owned the painting until her death, in 2005, and Christie's had set its high estimate at just over three million dollars. "It's going to get seven," Meyer said, dispiritedly. A collector friend who intended to bid on the Bacon had asked Meyer as a favor to assess the work at the Christie's preview. By prearrangement with Christie's, Meyer was scheduled to look at the Bacon at four-thirty.

At four-fifteen, in the back seat of the town car that drove him to the Christie's showroom, in South Kensington, he talked about whether it was a conflict of interest for him to advise a buyer at a Christie's sale. "I won't call anybody up and say, 'Hey, have you seen that Bacon at Christie's?'" he said. "But if somebody asks me my opinion about this, I will try to give an honest opinion."

At Christie's, Meyer was greeted with wary civility at the front desk, then escorted by Fernando Mignoni, the head of the house's London department of postwar art, to a cramped gallery on the ground floor. Meyer walked up to the painting, which was even smaller than the Antonello Annunciation at the Met. Bacon's face, staring out at the viewer, is smeared and grossly distorted in places, like a computer image frozen at the moment of morphing into something else. Meyer's face hovered inches from the glass that covered the painting. "He was obsessed with Cubism," he muttered. "But also with Degas." He pointed to a series of fine hatch marks, in yellow paint, above the eyes and the twisted mouth. "Bacon would dip a cashmere sweater into paint, then dab it onto the canvas," he said. He turned to Mignoni.

"Can I see it out of the frame, please?"

"Of course," Mignoni said. He unhooked the painting from the chain that held it to the wall and carried it to a small private room. There he placed it face down on a small table. Pasted to the back were a number of labels, denoting places where the painting had been on loan at various museums. "She didn't lend it out much," Mignoni said.

"I wouldn't, either," Meyer said.

Mignoni used an electric screwdriver to try to loosen the brackets that secured the painting's backing, but he had little success. Meyer impatiently seized a manual one and went at the screws awkwardly with his left hand—his right arm was still not fully healed. When he had loosened the screws, he said, "You, please." Mignoni carefully removed the painting from its frame and then handed it to Meyer, who accepted it as though it were a container of nitroglycerin.

Out of its frame and glass, the painting looked new and raw: messy drips of paint were visible on the sides of the canvas, and the pigment seemed brighter. Meyer held the painting under his nose, tilting it this way and that, like someone searching for thumbprints on a compact disk. He tapped lightly with his fingertips on the nails that held the canvas to the stretcher. Then he held the painting at arm's length and stared at it for several seconds. He sighed. "That's great art," he said. He turned to Mignoni. "No restoration?"

"No."

"Well, there it is," Meyer said, with resignation, as he surrendered the painting to the Christie's man.

In the car travelling back to Sotheby's, Meyer looked unhappy. "I think it's going to be seven million," he said. "I'm definitely going to recommend it."

That evening, Meyer had drinks at his London apartment with a collector from whom he hoped to win a consignment for the May sale in New York. Then he went to dinner with two collector friends who had consigned a Man Ray painting to Sotheby's Modern and Impressionist sale, which was being held that night. But Meyer also kept abreast of events at the Christie's contemporary sale as they unfolded across town. A Sotheby's employee who was attending the sale gave Meyer regular updates via cell phone, and before the evening was over Meyer knew that Christie's was having an extraordinary night. The auction house sold fifty-eight works, for a total of $64.6 million, a record for a contemporary-art sale in Europe. The Bacon self-portrait sold for just under nine million dollars.

The news of Christie's triumph seemed to settle Meyer's nerves. Two days later, on the morning of the day of the Sotheby's sale, he arrived at work in a cheerful mood. He was dressed in a dark-chocolate-colored corduroy suit and handmade Berluti shoes. "I feel energized that the market is strong," he said of the Christie's sale. "But I feel competitive." Meyer swept his security pass over the card reader mounted beside a doorway marked "Staff Only" and passed from Sotheby's elegantly appointed reception area into a dark, Dickensian corridor. Since the early nineteen-hundreds, Sotheby's has expanded from a building on New Bond Street into sixteen adjacent buildings, which are connected by narrow, windowless passageways and winding staircases. Meyer made his way quickly through a maze of corridors and mounted a final set of steep stairs, taking them two at a time, to emerge at a warren of offices on the fourth floor of a converted town house. There he was greeted by a small group of his senior staff, who had assembled to prep him on the evening's sale.

To the uninitiated, an auction looks like a spontaneous outpouring of bids. In reality, if an auction team has done its work the sale is virtually a foregone conclusion. For months prior to the event, Meyer and his staff are in close touch with potential bidders, "pre-selling" the art, assuring collectors that a particular work will fit in with the rest of their art, discussing payment terms and schedules, and trying to fan small sparks of interest into blazes of acquisitive lust, all the while attempting to glean how high a potential buyer might be prepared to bid. It's a process that continues until the final minutes before the sale, and Meyer and his staff were eager to get through the prep meeting and continue talking up the pieces to the dealers and collectors milling downstairs.

The team crowded into the cluttered office of Cheyenne Westphal, a vivacious blond woman in her thirties, who is chairman of contemporary art for Europe. Westphal sat at a desk heaped with auction catalogues. Anthony Grant, Sotheby's senior international specialist, shared a small couch with two other specialists, Oliver Barker and Francis Outred. Meyer, who had shed his jacket, perched on the low sill of a bay window that overlooked the street.

"O.K., where are we?" Meyer said, flipping the auction catalogue open on his knees. He turned to a page displaying "Arg-Asp," by Damien Hirst, a two-foot-by-two-foot painting of colored dots on a white ground. "How does it look?" he asked.

"Tons and tons of interest," Westphal said.

"Will it make two hundred?" Meyer asked.

"Yes," Grant said.

"Fantastic," Meyer replied. On the page opposite the Hirst painting, he wrote "200." (Later, he would transfer his notes, including the location in the room of certain likely bidders, who reserve seats in advance, into his auction book, which he keeps open in front of him on the rostrum and uses to guide him through a sale, much the way a conductor refers to a score while conducting a symphony.) Meyer and his colleagues continued to review the evening's lots. In some cases, the team had been unable to confirm bidders. "A little skinny," Meyer would say, making a note in his book. In other cases, his colleagues told him that there were "two telephones" or "three telephones," a reference to absentee bidders, who, either because they desired anonymity or because they lived in Berlin or Taipei or Sebastopol, had prearranged to bid by phone. In several instances, Meyer was told that there were as many as five phones—"5 tel," he wrote in his catalogue.

Lot fourteen was problematic: a large Gerhard Richter abstract that should fetch an astronomical price, except that Richter, an idiosyncratic man, had inexplicably refused to include the painting in his catalogue raisonné.

"So," Meyer said. "What's it going to do?"

"I don't know . . ." Westphal began.

"Skinny," Meyer said, and made a note.

"I've been trying to get something tangible," Westphal said. "There are so many people dancing around it. But unless we can get something firm it might just flop."

"If we get one bid to start it off, something will happen," Meyer said.

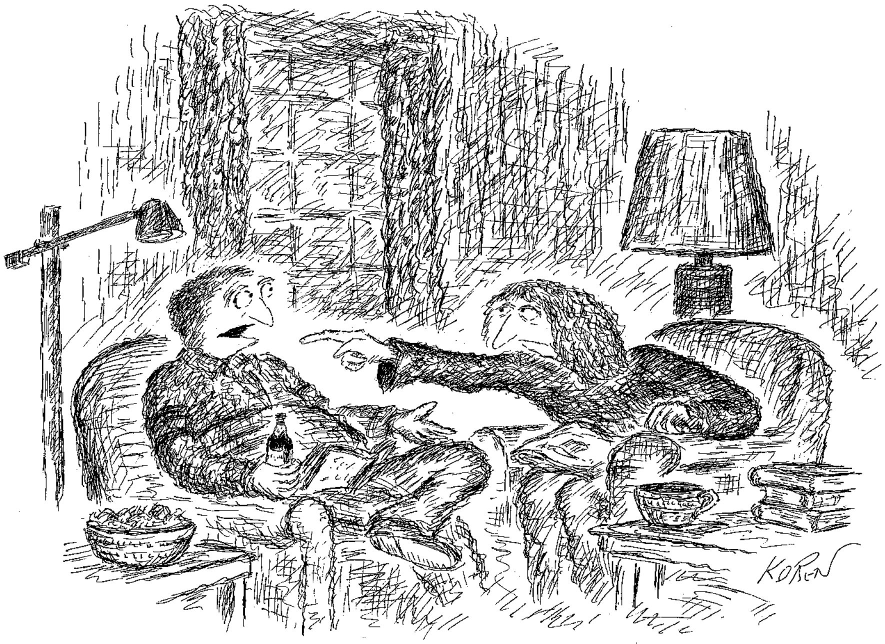
A few minutes later, his jacket on the sill beside him twittered. "Ahh," he said. "My birds." He pulled out his cell phone and put it to his ear. His eyes widened, and he held up a forefinger to silence his colleagues. "So you're downstairs now?" he said into the phone. "Certainly."

He snapped the phone shut. "Can we finish this later?" he said, jumping up and slipping on his jacket. "That was our friend who's interested in the Caro. He wants to talk to me—now."

"Go," Westphal said.

The piece in question, a large, abstract Anthony Caro sculpture, was a centerpiece of the evening's sale, a major work from 1962 that had never been to auction. Sotheby's had set the high estimate at three hundred and fifty thousand pounds, to entice bidders; but Meyer and his colleagues believed that it would go for at least a million, provided they could arouse enough excitement about it beforehand. One way to do that was to gratify a potential buyer's desire to talk to the top man.

Meyer ran down the steep staircases, through the zigzagging corridors, then pushed through the security door leading to the reception area. There he slowed to a fast walk, cutting through the eddies of well-dressed people, and hurried up a broad, carpeted staircase, turning sharply right and arriving in a room that held only the Caro and a few paintings. There was no sign of the collector. Meyer, looking panicked, took



"Could we skip the prosecution and get on to the sentencing phase?"

out his cell phone. Then he saw the man emerging from an adjoining gallery. He pocketed his phone, raked a dangling forelock from his forehead, and gracefully, almost languidly, greeted the collector.

A stocky, middle-aged man, the collector wore a baggy sweater, loose-fit faded jeans, and loafers, and shouldered a sports backpack. He was a wealthy man who worked in finance, but he preferred anonymity and, indeed, would send an agent to the sale to bid for him. (Meyer says that this attitude is typical of the current generation of collectors, unlike those of the eighties, when conspicuous consumption was in vogue and newly rich junk-bond kings made a point of waving their auction paddles ostentatiously.)

Meyer and the collector shook hands and drifted toward the Caro, an eleven-foot-long, seven-foot-high assemblage of construction-site girders bolted and welded together and painted army green. Meyer, gazing at the sculpture, said, in a low rumble, “It’s amazing.”

The collector glanced at him, then back at the sculpture. They talked quietly for several minutes, discussing the number of buyers who were interested in the piece, and the price it was likely to fetch. Meyer told the man that the work would go for at least a million dollars. The man nodded. Later, Meyer told me that the man was going to buy the Caro, “no matter what I say about the piece.” Indeed, it was clear that Meyer’s job at this point was less one of salesmanship than a kind of psychological enabling, with the goal of removing any lingering resistance the man might have to the thought of disbursing more than a million dollars for a bunch of welded girders. To do this, Meyer must be able to understand what it is that makes someone desire the pleasure that comes not only from looking at art but from owning it. “Owning art, unlike seeing it in a museum, is a very primal pleasure,” Meyer said. “Having it there, close to you, something that you associate with great beauty or great emotional expression, something that you associate with a soul, or with status—owning it gives you another status—is very important; it’s a very intense feeling for many people.” Above all else, Meyer says, his task at this stage is to let collectors know that “desiring an object, desiring to own an object—that it’s O.K.”

The collector’s wife entered the gallery and approached the sculpture. Meyer kissed the woman’s cheek. Then he receded a few paces and leaned against a doorjamb, crossing his legs at the ankle.

“It’s amazing,” the man told his wife.

Six hours later, a standing-room-only crowd of more than a thousand well-dressed men and women had assembled in Sotheby’s main sale room. The atmosphere was one of barely suppressed frenzy, as dealers and collectors flipped through the auction catalogue, spoke in a babel of languages into cell phones, and strove for a clear view of the rostrum—a dark wooden object that resembled the prow of a ship. Appearing fifteen minutes before the auction’s seven-o’clock start time, Meyer, dressed in an elegant charcoal suit of bird’s-eye weave, a white shirt, and a dark-blue tie, strolled up the center aisle between five hundred folding chairs. He lingered, flashing his teeth in a smile, and shook hands. He had eaten a light lunch, had the short nap that he customarily takes, or tries to take, before an auction, and had had some black tea. At one minute to seven, Meyer walked to the front of the room. He climbed the three steps to the podium, opened his auctioneer’s book, and lifted the gavel in his right hand. Then he brought it down with a crack and announced the start of the sale.

A man wearing an apron and gloves appeared from behind a scrim to Meyer’s left, and placed on an easel a painting by Martin Kippenberger, “Capri by Night.” The crowd shifted to get a look at the work. Throwing his resonant baritone to the back of the room, Meyer ran the bidding up in seconds from thirty thousand to sixty thousand pounds, then to seventy and eighty thousand, until he had an offer of a hundred and seventy. Above Meyer, a large flat-screen monitor converted each bid, as he called it out, into U.S. dollars, euros, Swiss francs, Hong Kong dollars, and yen. Meyer’s style at the rostrum was dynamic, almost dance-like; he indicated the direction of each bid in the room by throwing out an arm and using the palm of the opposite hand to hold back a rival bidder. In heated moments, when two bidders on opposite sides of the room were going head to head, Meyer seesawed his body back and forth from one to the other in crisp, Kabuki-like moves, and called out each new bid with a note of challenge, as if daring the opponent to go one higher. At times, Meyer fixed a reluctant bidder with a stern gaze and demanded to know if he was truly out—thereby provoking a new bid; at other times, he leaned his elbows confidentially on the podium, gazing at a bidder with a coaxing smile, and murmuring conspiratorially, “One more? Shall we make it one-eighty?” Westphal is particularly fond of Meyer’s trademark move, when the bidding on a work reaches nine hundred thousand pounds, of glancing at a bidder and casually saying, “Make it a million.” When a painting by Albert Oehlen, called “DJ Techno,” climbed slowly, in cautious bids, to a hundred and ninety thousand pounds, Meyer quipped, “Now we have to get to two hundred—we waited so long!” Even as the auction entered its second hour, Meyer showed no sign of losing steam. “You need to be quite physically fit to do this,” Mitchell-Innes told me. “It’s a little bit like opera singing. The strain on your voice, and the demand on your muscles and the way you breathe—these all seem like little things, but they’re enormous when you’ve done it for three hours.”

At the rostrum, Meyer seeks to encourage “auction magic”—to conjure, through a combination of body language and tone of voice, some ineffable spirit that will make the bidding spiral upward beyond anyone’s expectations. He accomplished this with lot seven, a collage by Richard Hamilton called “Fashion-Plate (cosmetic study X).” When the bidding reached three hundred thousand pounds—a hundred and twenty thousand above the high estimate—a phone bidder, speaking to Oliver Barker, started to come in with high bids, driving the price up beyond four hundred thousand pounds in a matter of seconds. “That was so surprising,”

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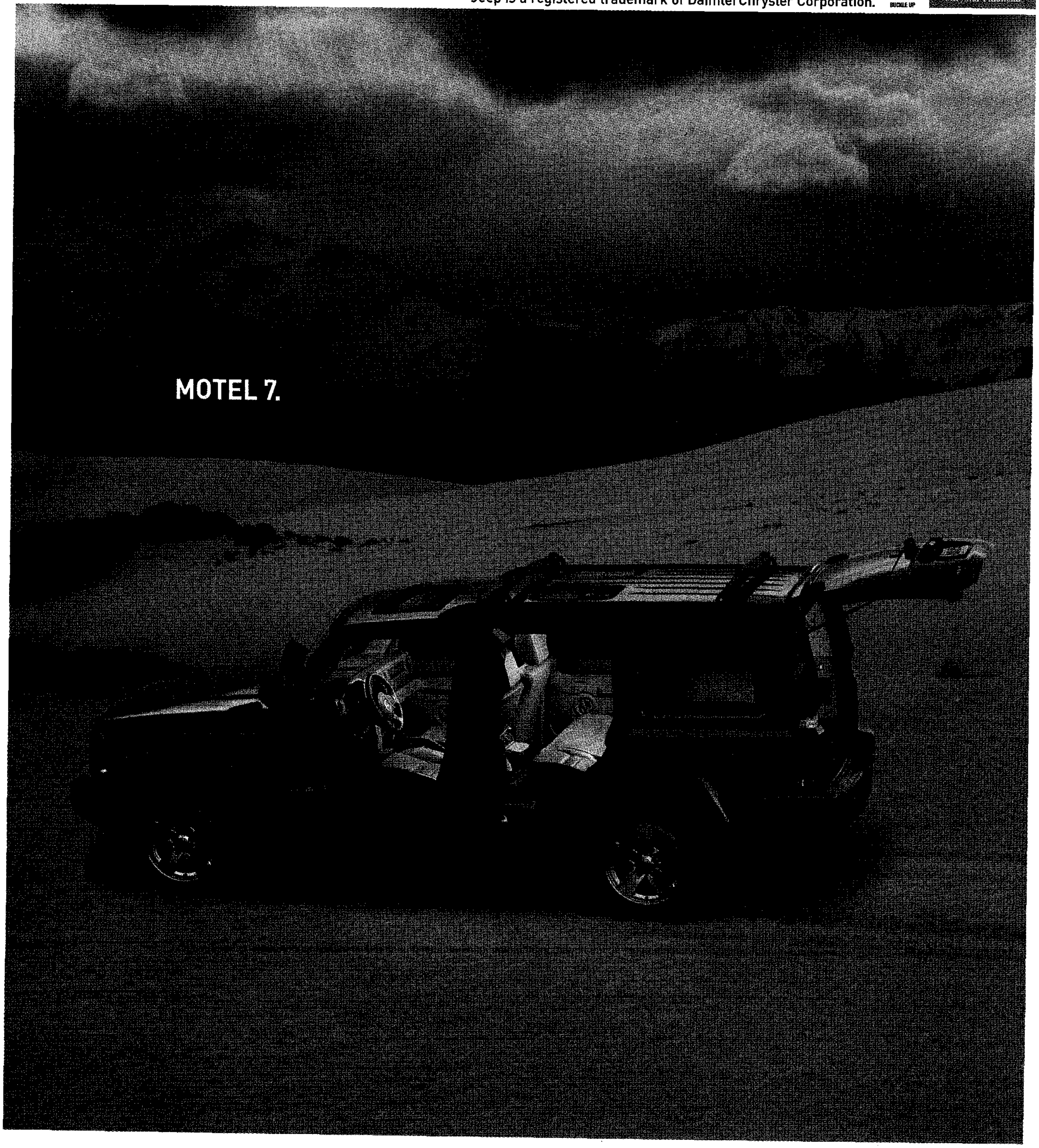

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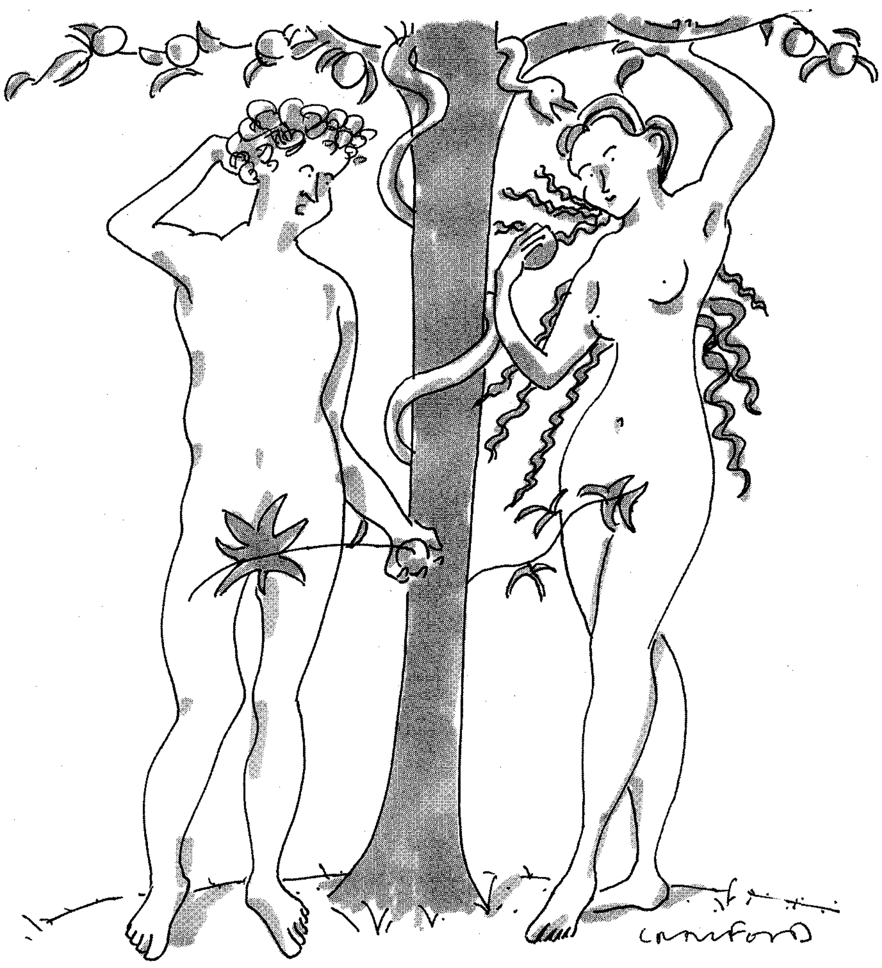

"That's what you're wearing to Hell?"

• •

Meyer said later, "because we had no idea that that bidder would kick in, and we were already at three hundred thousand pounds and suddenly *pop!* Ollie looked at me and there was this smile, when you know you really have a turbocharger. It was very exciting—this adrenaline-charged moment, like the light in the room goes up; this slight wattage amplification."

Something similar happened with the Richter painting that Westphal had feared might flop. It surged quickly to a million pounds, then to two million. Meyer, his voice booming, called out the bids: "Two million, two million fifty, two million one hundred thousand, two million one hundred and fifty, two million three hundred thousand, two million three hundred and fifty thousand, two million four hundred thousand." There was a momentum to the way Meyer clocked the bids which suggested that they might go on climbing forever, but the bidding finally stopped at two million four hundred and fifty thousand pounds (or $4,801,690, including the fee that the house charges the buyer on top of the sale price). The Caro sculpture, too, exceeded expectations, going, finally, to a buyer whom Sotheby's will identify only as "an anonymous American collector," for a million two hundred and fifty thousand pounds (with the buyer's premium, $2,456,678).

After the sale, which lasted more than two hours, Meyer rushed from the rostrum to his colleagues at one side of the room, where they had been taking the phone bids. They surrounded him and embraced him, like a hockey team celebrating an overtime goal. Oliver Barker grabbed him by the shoulders.

"That Richard Hamilton!" Barker said.

"I know! I know! I saw that spark come into your eyes!" Meyer said.

Despite his obvious joy, Meyer's face looked gaunt and drained. At a press conference after the sale, he steadied himself by leaning on the Caro sculpture with one hand. In the other hand, he held a glass of white wine, from which he took hurried sips and soon emptied. In a slightly apologetic tone, he told the large group of assembled reporters that it was the longest sale over which he had ever presided. "Because we were able to attract so many private buyers—new collectors—they need a longer time to make up their minds," he explained. "That's why you saw me taking small increments." Meyer also talked about the lively bidding from collectors in China, who represented eight per cent of the night's buyers and constitute a new market that Sotheby's is courting aggressively. (Some of the paintings in the sale were shown in Hong Kong and Taipei.) Increasing demand in China, Russia, and India, Meyer said, means that, for all the explosion in contemporary-art prices, "we have not started."

Barker, who was standing at Meyer's side, read from a sheet of paper the sale's results: £30,368,800. "A record for Sotheby's London," he said. It was an impressive sum, but it was also seven million pounds less than Christie's sale had garnered two nights earlier—about the difference of the Bacon self-portrait that Meyer had inspected. "I wish we had had the small Bacon," Meyer said later. "But I was so happy with our results that it didn't really matter." Still, the next day Meyer was on his way first to France and then to Italy, where, he said, he had an appointment with the owner of some "very serious twentieth-century pictures."

A few weeks earlier, in New York, Meyer had told me, "I still think to this very day that I have to work very, very hard to stay where I am. I'm constantly reminded that it is not permanent. I was laughing with Mark yesterday, because I was having my anxious moment. I was saying, 'I'm not doing enough of this, I have to do more of that, and what's going on, and blah-blah-blah.' And he said, 'Baby, will you relax? Tobias, you just sold the most expensive work of art ever'"—meaning Picasso's "Boy with Pipe" two years ago. "And I said, 'I know, but that was *then!*' "♦

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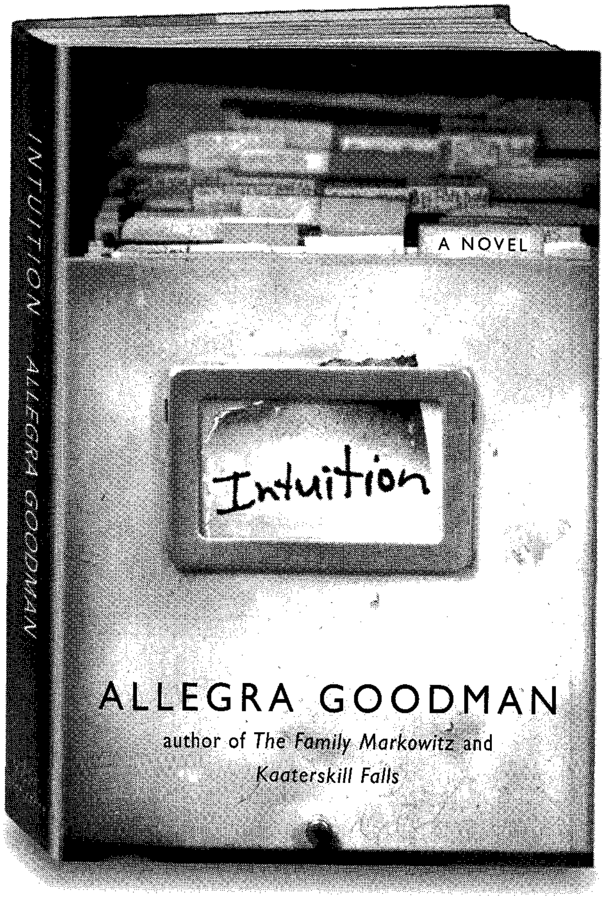
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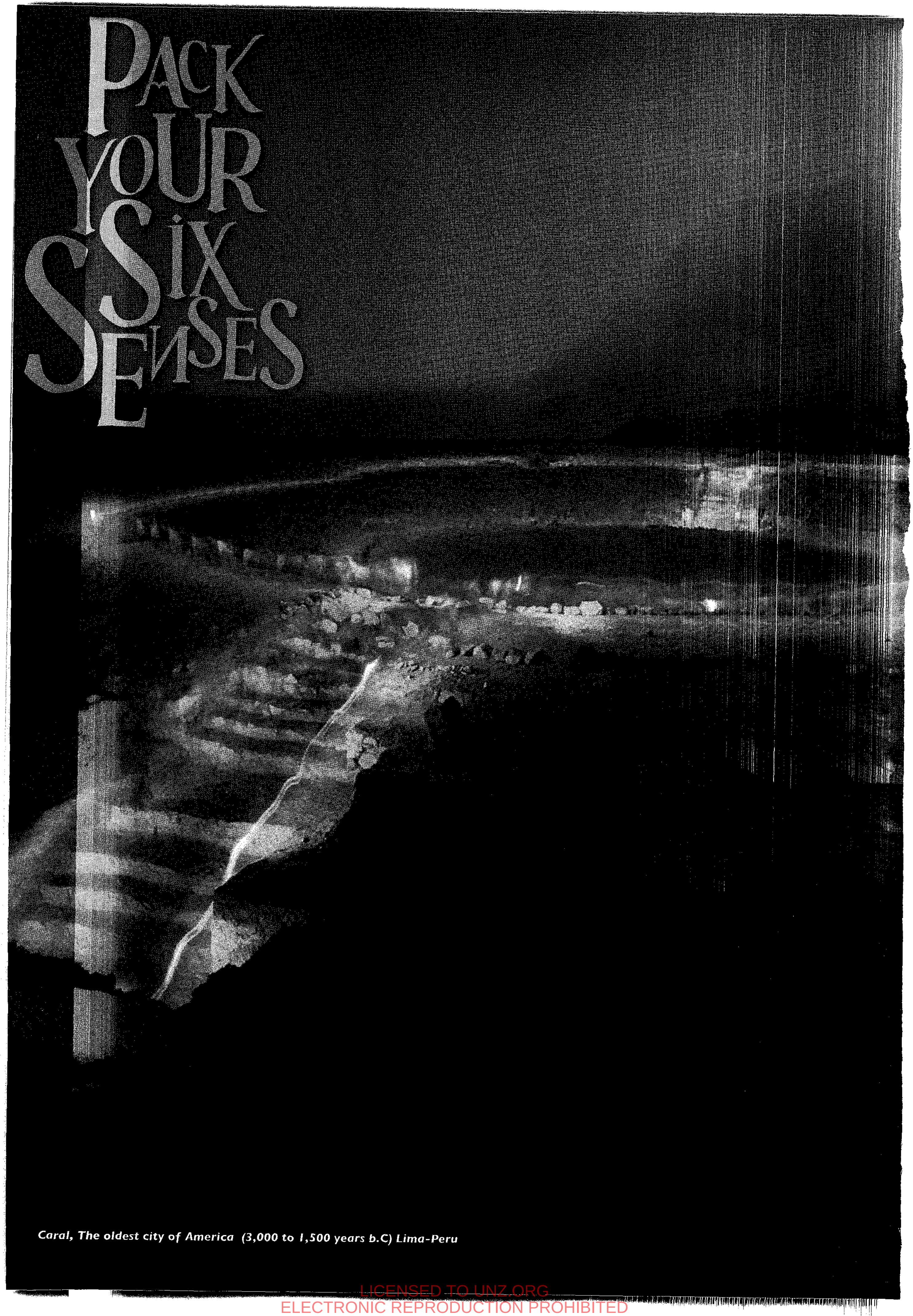
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Enigmatic Destination Piques the Senses

by Rob Rachowiecki

Claiming more than 1,400 miles of desert coastal lowlands that sharply ascend to glacial Andean cordilleras reaching four miles into the sky, Peru is among the world's most geographically diverse countries. This mountain system precipitously plunges into the depths of Amazonian jungles, which cover over half the country. The climate is equally varied, with regions among the driest and the wettest on earth endowing the country with record levels of biodiversity.

WHERE THE WILDLIFE IS

Peru boasts more than 1,800 bird species (twice as many as in all North America), with more discovered every year. Small wonder that birders from the world over come to photograph squawking flocks of parrots and macaws at clay licks bordering the Amazon, or to marvel at the iconic Andean condor soaring past the planet's highest tropical mountains.

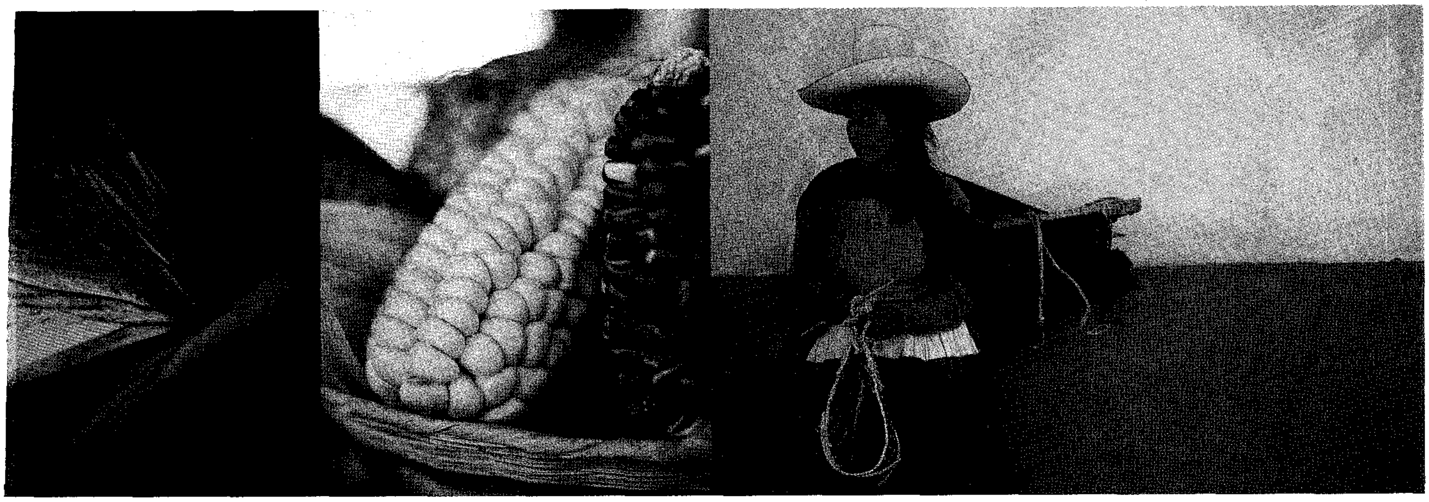
Wildlife enthusiasts converge on the coast to observe sea-lion colonies, trek into the Andes to view llamas, alpacas, and vicuña (camelids) or descend into the Amazon rain forest where flora and fauna are in splendid abundance. Based in remote jungle lodges, adventurous travelers voyage in dugout canoes guided by eagle-eyed locals who know where to find cavorting monkeys, families of giant river otters, banana-beaked toucans, and elusive jaguars. The indigenous peoples living here are frequently separated by language, of which there are dozens, but are often united by fables about the mysterious pink river dolphins. Said to transform themselves into humans, they are sometimes conveniently blamed for a surprise pregnancy!

ANCIENT WONDERS

Almost half of the population is indigenous, with most speaking the Quechua tongue that links it to the great Inca Empire. During the fifteenth century, the Incas constructed an Andean road network from present-day Colombia to Argentina that connected marvelous temples and cities, of which the most famed is Machu Picchu. Intrepid hikers reach the site with a four-day trek along the Inca Trail, while others experience the dramatic scenery via train or helicopter that depart from the Inca capital of Cusco (Quechua for "navel of the earth").

Peru's prehistoric sites are as varied as its geography and peoples, and the Inca are the tip of an archaeological iceberg that goes back almost five thousand years. A seemingly unending array of tombs, pyramids, and sacred places continues to be unearthed by treasure-seekers, explorers, and scientists. In 1987, an incredibly rich and well-preserved tomb was discovered deep within a huge pyramid at Sipán, built by the Moche in the northern coastal desert around 300 A.D. Excavation revealed the most precious intact burial site ever found in the continent. After restoration, its valuable contents toured worldwide before being permanently installed

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: MACHU PICCHU © PROMPERU; YOUNG GIRL NEAR QUESCA © FRÉDÉRIC LAGRANGE; GOURDS © FRANCESCO VENTURI/CORBIS; BLUE MORPHO BUTTERFLY © DAVID MCLAIN/AURORA; CORN AT CUSCO MARKET © FRÉDÉRIC LAGRANGE; PERUVIAN WOMAN © DON MASON/CORBIS



in the Royal Tombs Museum in Lambayeque. From Lima, take a short flight to nearby Chiclayo or travel like a local on a comfortable all-day bus along the coast.

Roughly contemporary to the Moche period, unrelated cultures of the southern coastal area created giant biomorphic and geometrical figures known as the Nasca Lines. Covering miles of high desert plateau, the enigmatic designs, including a coil-tailed monkey and spread-winged condor, are each larger than a football field, while the geometric patterns are perfectly proportioned and bigger still. Why the lines were executed baffles archaeologists, and how prehistoric Nasca people achieved this graphic precision continues to mystify mathematicians. To fully appreciate the spectacle, airborne tours in light aircraft available locally are essential.

Revolutionary Discovery The oldest organized cultures are found near the Pacific Coast. Some were thought to date back almost four millennia, until a recent excavation at Caral revealed pyramids and plazas that were carbon-dated to between 3000 and 2000 B.C. (around when the Egyptians were building their own pyramids), making Caral by far the oldest-known urban society in the Americas.

INSIDE INFORMATION

For best exchange rates use debit cards in ATMs; credit-card commissions are as high as ten per cent.

January through April is the wettest period in the mountains; May is gloriously green, and June through August is peak season.

Book reservations for Inca Trail hikes ninety days or more in advance.

For better digestion at high altitude eat a big lunch and a lighter dinner.

Taxis are meter-less: Arrange fares beforehand and haggle hard!

Internet cafés are everywhere and charge a dollar or less per hour.

Remember that a $30.25 cash tax is charged at Lima airport before your international departure.

VISIT WWW.PERU.INFO

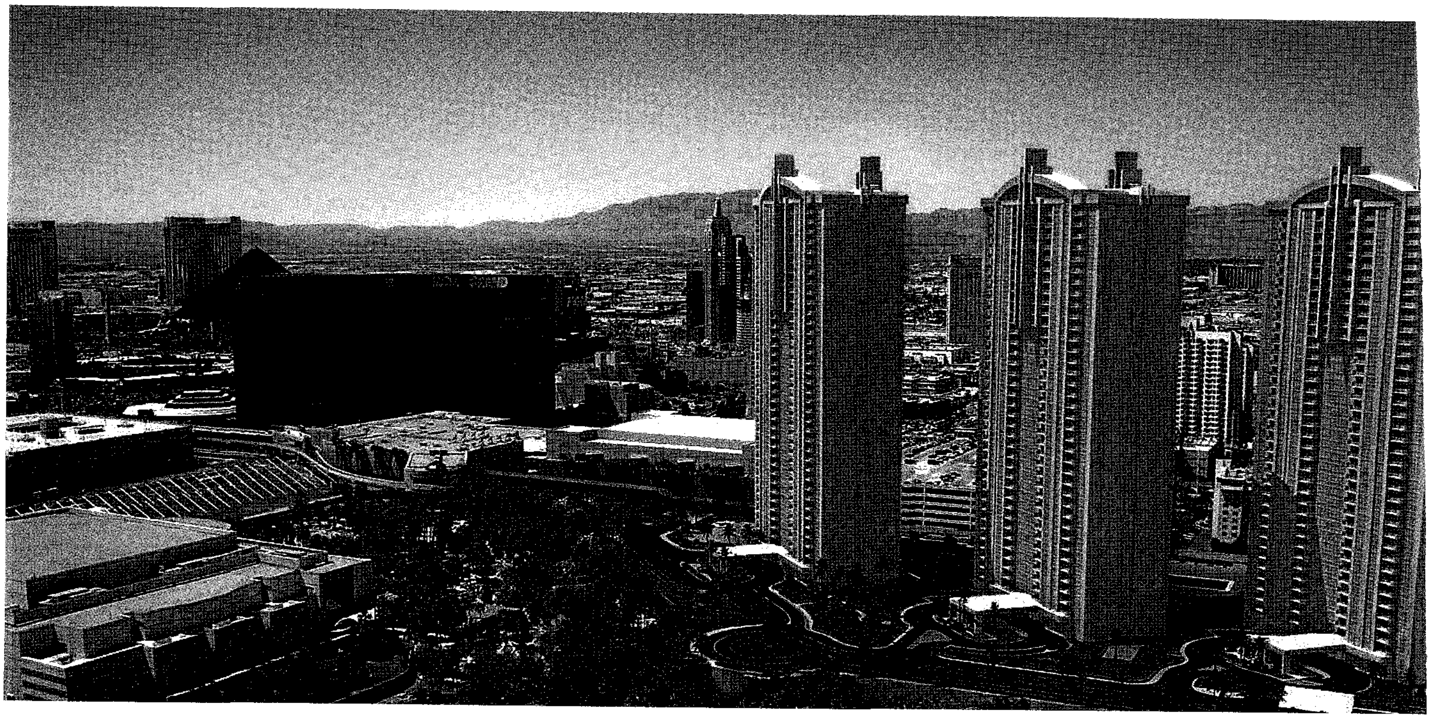
GASTRONOMIC SECRETS

Peruvian gastronomy has transcended its ancient origins to become one of the country's greatest secrets. Using the freshest of local produce, Peruvian cuisine is world-class. Ceviche, for example, containing chunks of fresh fish or other seafood marinated in lime, is the unofficial national dish and the people's favorite. Usually complemented with sweet or toasted corn, tangy onions, hot peppers, and yuca, the recipe varies from restaurant to restaurant, each claiming to prepare the best.

The adventurous palate can feast on *rocoto relleno* (stuffed hot peppers), *ají de gallina* (shredded chicken in a mouth-watering sauce of milk, mild peppers, cheese, nuts, and onions), tender goat stew, or roasted guinea pig—once considered the special dish of Incan nobility. Accompany your meal with the superbly smooth national cocktail, the pisco sour, made from a white-grape brandy distilled on the South Coast.

Peru has more to offer than can be imagined, and inquisitive travelers discover how the friendliness of the sybaritic Peruvians, the extraordinary wildlife and archaeological wonders, and the fantastic scenery and cuisine continue to call them back to this most diverse of countries.

*(**Rob Rachowiecki** has guided adventure tours to Peru for more than twenty years and authored several guidebooks.)*



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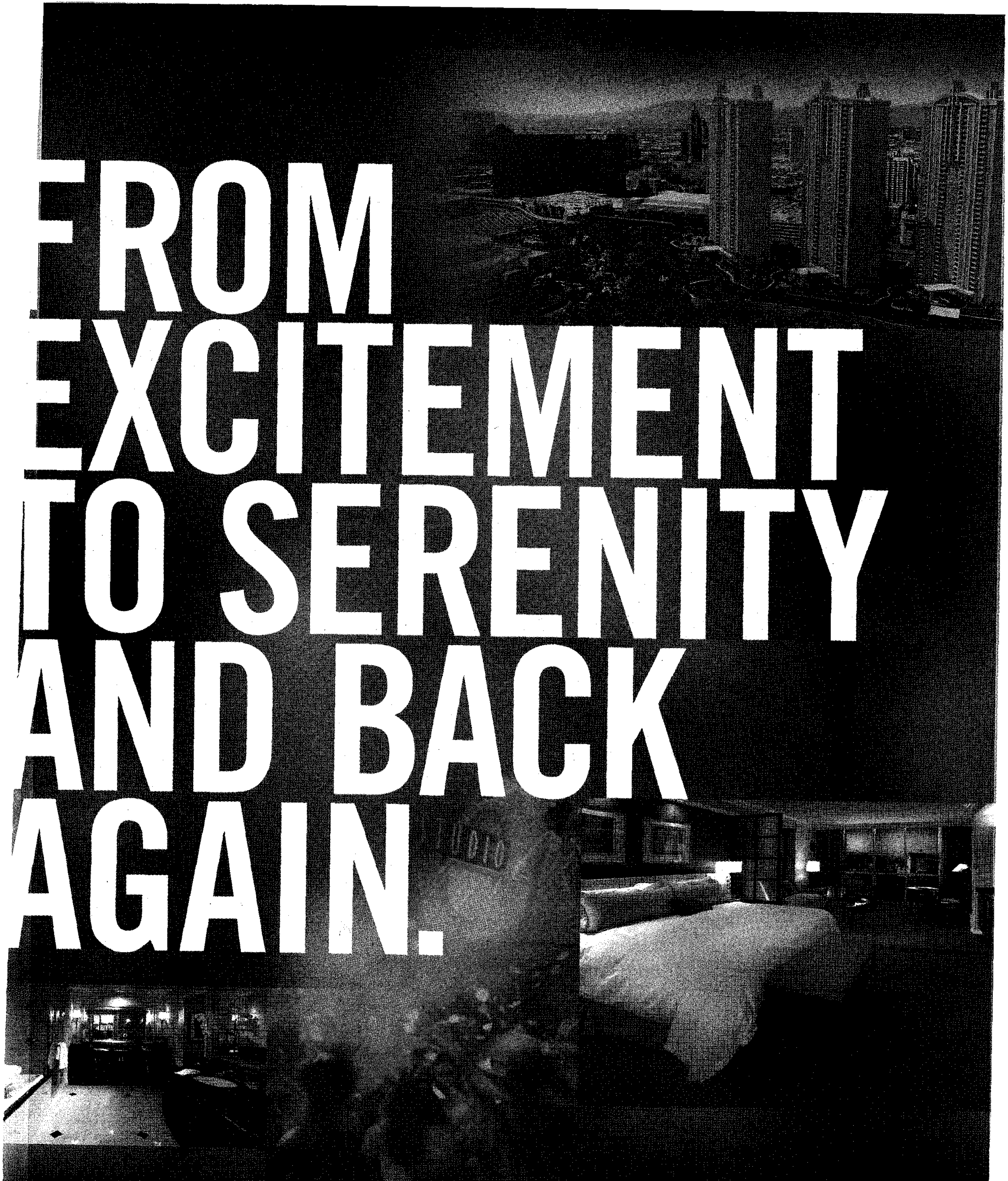

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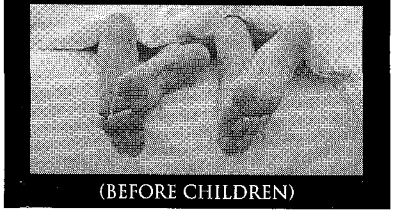

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THE UTOPIANS

Yaddo meets Club Med.

BY BEN McGRATH

A little more than a year ago, over the Christmas holidays, I descended in a small helicopter onto a stretch of pristine white sand. The beach, set against a striking coral cliff some ninety feet high, lay just east of a golf course—one of the last designed by the late Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Not a building was in sight. This was in the Dominican Republic, on the less travelled north coast, fronting the Atlantic, and I had been invited there by Boykin Curry, who stood on the sand with his fiancée, Celerie Kemble, waving a towel in the air to greet me.

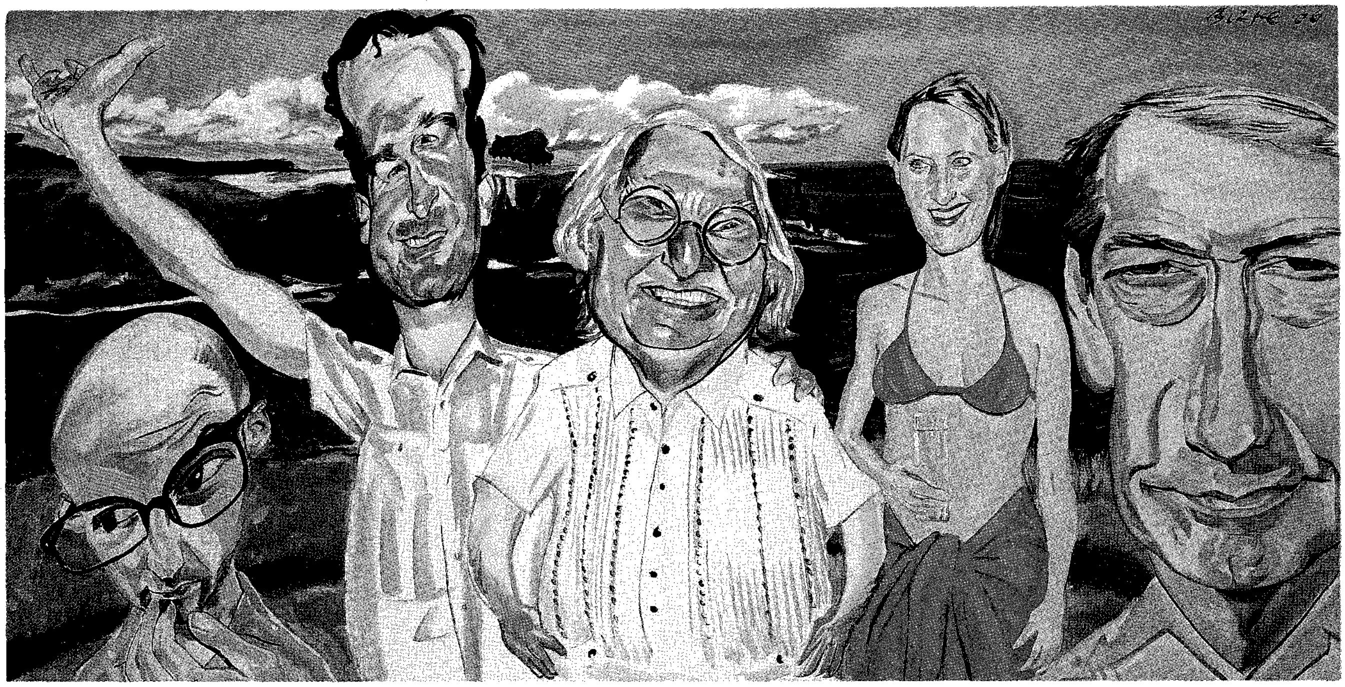
Five minutes later, as I floated in the surf, a young American couple approached from the direction of a nondescript hotel called the Occidental, situated beyond the cliff. Noticing the helicopter, the woman said, "Now *that's* the way to travel like millionaires. Is it very expensive?" She likely assumed that Curry, sunburned in a faded red bathing suit and a pink T-shirt, and with windblown dark curly hair, was staying at the Occidental as well—a fellow-gringo living it up on the cheap in a country with a per-capita G.D.P. of only sixty-five hundred dollars.

But Curry, who is forty, was a highly successful money manager from Manhattan. He owned the course, the cliffs, the mountains behind the cliffs, the rolling jungles in between, the bluffs out to the east—everything in the area, as far as the eye could see, *except* for the Occidental. And even that was just a matter of time; he and Kemble, a thirty-two-year-old interior designer, already controlled the hotel's water supply, beach access, and electricity, and were in negotiations to buy and demolish it.

A few months earlier, acting on a tip from a friend of Kemble's, Curry had flown down, drafted a prospectus, and corralled a group of friends, including the musician and eco-activist Moby, the television interviewer Charlie Rose, and the foreign-policy whiz Fareed Zakaria, to help buy an enormous tract of land, known locally as Playa Grande, or Big Beach, and establish what he called a Creative Person's Utopia. ("We are going to keep it Bohemian, and not filled with dentists who got lucky in the stock market," he wrote in one pitch letter.) Except for the golf course, the twenty-two-hundred-acre plot—nearly three times the size of Central Park—was unspoiled. They picked it up for fifty million dollars.

After my swim, I climbed back into the helicopter with Curry and Kemble, and we began touring the property, which extends about five miles along the coast, flanked by a nudist colony and a Rochester doctor's retirement mansion. As Curry elaborated on his vision, it emerged that the utopia he had in mind was a twenty-first-century, jet-setting variety, in which golf, a game he does not play, could be used to subsidize an artists' colony and other noble pursuits. Curry's enthusiasms include organic subsistence farming, environmental conservation, and entomology. ("Boykin will do anything to have an insect named after him," Kemble told me.) He imagined a classical Athenian village—updated—in which four-star restaurants and art galleries could share street space with locally run fish shacks and pool halls; with great public plazas, where Op-Ed columnists like David Brooks and Thomas Friedman might gather to discuss anti-terrorism strategy with Zakaria and Rose, and then join Moby and his friend Michael Stipe for a concert on the beach, followed by a nightcap with Matthew Barney, the "Cremaster" artist, observing the migration of the humpback whales, headed east to spawn near Samaná.

On the western edge of the golf course, Curry showed me a paved cul-de-sac that was overgrown with weeds—evidence of the Dominican government's aborted attempt to develop the property some years back. "See, sloth is our friend," he said. "They had the foresight, the vi-



Moby, Boykin Curry, Richard Meier, Celerie Kemble, and Charlie Rose want to turn a Dominican retreat into a creative Eden.

PHILIP BURKE

sion, to keep it all together as one giant property, without breaking it up piecemeal—and the incompetence not to do anything with it. If they hadn't been so incompetent, there would be ten Club Meds here by now."

Sloth had not prevented the government from building the so-called North Coast highway, a potholed two-lane road used occasionally by wild pigs, through the middle of the property. Curry hoped to persuade the government to reroute the road behind the property line. After we left the helicopter and were driving west along the highway, headed to our hotel in the tourist town of Cabarete, which is known for its favorable kite-surfing conditions, one of the car's tires went flat. "The road here is not so pretty," the driver remarked.

"Good time to move it and repave it!" Curry said.

Although the Dominican peso had nearly doubled in value in the five months since he had first visited the country, Curry kept pointing out new things that he might like to buy: a large farm, owned by a family of Dominican sisters, adjacent to the lot's southeastern boundary; a radio tower in the neighboring town of Rio San Juan. As we walked into the lobby of a small hotel, which was apparently for sale at a price of a million dollars, and beheld a view of the waves crashing against the seawall below, Curry turned to me and said, "Just think, all this could be yours for the price of a small Manhattan apartment."

Fareed Zakaria, who is a regular guest at the Aspen Institute, Davos, and other northern retreats, told me that he was attracted to the Dominican Republic as a potential tropical alternative. "I've never liked Florida, to begin with. It's basically not that attractive and not that warm," he said. "So if you go an hour further . . ."

Shortly after my arrival, the weather grew unreliable and rainy. Curry, Kemble, and I spent a fair amount of time waiting, eating, and looking out toward the ocean from the scallop-shaped golf clubhouse.

Even so, there were signs that the D.R. may finally be approaching Next Hot Destination status. Curry's friend George Mueller, an L.E.D.-lighting entrepreneur and one of the twenty "founding residents" of Playa Grande, had spotted a familiar face in first class on his flight down; it turned out to be Donatella Versace, who was staying at a new resort just west of the Puerto Plata airport. On the other hand, Mueller's luggage was confiscated after customs agents discovered camouflage pants in his bag—designer bell-bottoms—and tagged him as either a paramilitary threat or an easy shakedown victim. It took him two days to get his gear back.

Each of Curry's visits so far had been accompanied by one or two disenchantments. On his first stay, the drinking water had made him sick, and he now insisted on Evian, even for brushing his teeth. "This time, it's the mosquitoes and the weather," he said. One evening, when we went swimming, the water was surprisingly brisk, not unlike the breeze.

"This is like being in Maine, in June," Curry said. "And we're on a tropical island. This is about the worst thing I can say about a place." He dipped underwater, reëmerged with a cautious smile, and announced, "At Playa Grande, in the regime of Boykin Curry, all the pools will be eighty-eight degrees! I decree, as phase one of my utopian experiment!"

Curry's Manhattan apartment, on the twenty-seventh floor of the Trump building on Central Park South, has an enormous terrace that overlooks the still thriving vision of Frederick Law Olmsted, one of Curry's heroes. There, he gives what seem like weekly cocktail parties and fund-raisers for largely progressive causes (charter schools, the film "Hotel Rwanda") and candidates (Eliot Spitzer, John Kerry), with guests ranging from Barack Obama to Courtney Love. (For one such gathering, he and Kemble brought together the Dominican President, Leonel Fernández, the architect Richard Meier, Zakaria, the Bronx politician Fernando Ferrer, the ex-congressman Herman Badillo, and a former Miss Ven-

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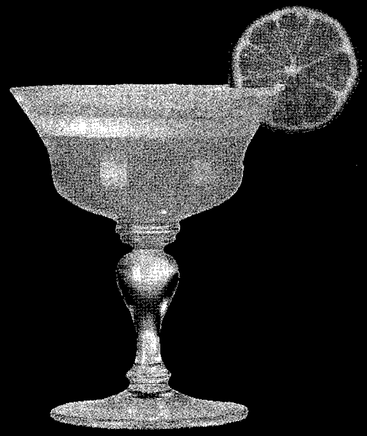

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1 part GRAND MARNIER®
2 parts premium tequila
Freshly squeezed lime juice
Sugar to taste

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ezuela.) "They're kind of arbiters of a life style, in many ways," said Alice Ryan, who serves on the board of the artsy downtown club SoHo House. An old college friend of Curry's likens him to a blend of Jay Gatsby and Howard Hughes, or, anyway, of their more endearing qualities.

Ravenel Boykin Curry IV was born into a prominent banking family from Greenwood, South Carolina, that relocated to suburban New Jersey. He is the oldest of three children—his sister, Caroline, is an investor with the family firm, Eagle Capital Management, and his brother, Marshall, makes documentary films. ("Street Fight" received an Oscar nomination this year.) From an early age, Boykin was drawn to his father's bedtime stories, which tended to focus on Winston Churchill and Averell Harriman, and he became hooked on biographies, reading two or three a week and thereby falling prey to the corrupting influence of what he calls "survivor bias"—the notion that every dreamer ends up a great success.

Boykin dreamed, first, of being a prison warden, and in grade school drew up blueprints of futuristic compounds and cities—proto-utopias, really—for reforming criminals and solving homelessness. During summer camp, after sixth grade, he frequently skipped morning activities to read the *Times* in the stairwell; before long, he became convinced that the corporate tax code needed restructuring, and tried forming a political-action committee. (He still talks about being pulled from the soccer field one day to answer a phone call. It was from the I.R.S.)

In high school, Boykin spent his summers mostly alone, working on a peach farm that his family owned back in South Carolina, an experience that "made for a good college essay," he says. He was accepted at Yale, where, as a freshman, he got the idea to publish a book of fifty "Essays That Worked"—literary models of idiosyncratic self-presentation for ambitious high-school seniors. The book became a best-seller, and he was invited to be a guest on the "CBS Morning News," which was then anchored by his future business partner Charlie Rose. ("It's a little bit like what Roosevelt said about Churchill," Rose told me when I asked him about Curry recently. "He said, 'Winston has one hundred ideas every day, of which four are very good.' And somebody added, 'Yeah, but that's four more than most people have.' ")

After graduating, in 1988, with a degree in economics, Curry got a job in management consulting—a dangerous career path, he now likes to say, because it encourages people to think that they can improve any situation with new and better ideas. Curry clearly didn't need much encouragement, and, having figured out a way to exploit the Pan Am shuttle's youth discount for easy frequent-flyer miles, spent his weekends hopping from Boston to New York to Washington and back, so that before long he could take free trips to Nairobi, Buenos Aires, and Warsaw. In 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini issued his fatwa against Salman Rushdie, causing bookstore chains to withdraw "The Satanic Verses" from their shelves, Curry and two college classmates established an 800 number and struck a deal with the book's publisher to fill the orders themselves.

He eventually attended Harvard Business School, and got an investment job in China. But he had no investment experience, and didn't speak the language, so he hired a family friend to accompany him as an interpreter, and taught himself one phrase, which he learned to say very well; roughly translated, it amounted to, "I only know how to say this one thing, so it would be great if you could keep talking in Chinese and I will simply nod and smile." Typically, the line drew a laugh, and gave the impression, to Curry's English-speaking colleagues, that he was fluent enough to joke around with the local businessmen. In 1997, he began running the Asia group at Kingdon Capital, a large and successful hedge fund. Today, in his investing for Eagle Capital, with his sister and his parents, Curry, who may be the least self-important money manager in town, preaches the dual principles of long-term perspective and unconventionality. "If anyone ever sees our stock portfolio and says, 'Oh, that's a great group of stocks,' then I am in trouble," he says. "I need people to see it and say, 'Why would you ever own all this stuff?' "

In the late nineties, by shorting foreign banks and construction companies before the East Asian crash, Curry made enough money to think about indulging

Its tme to spk
in rl wrds agn.

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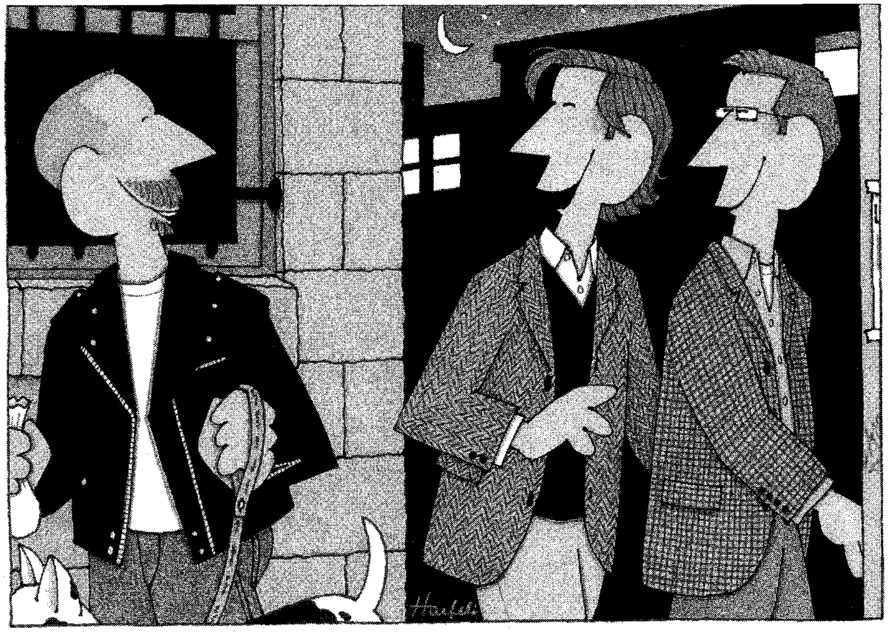
his long-standing "Mosquito Coast" fantasy, as he called it.

For years, he had been scouting territories as varied as Ko Samui, the outskirts of Moscow, central Java, and the Hudson Valley, renting boats, hiring pilots, and exhorting girlfriends and classmates to accompany him in exploring potential Shangri-las. Some girlfriends were more willing than others. He met Celerie, a fourth-generation Palm Beach aristocrat, in 1998, and they became fast friends, each finding the other "a bit ridiculous," Curry says. She had studied English at Harvard, and, like Curry, she had travelled widely. But it wasn't until he took her island-hunting off Croatia, in 2003, that he saw in her enthusiasm a complementary utopian spark. It was Celerie who introduced him to her friend Delio Gonzalez, who in turn introduced him to the Dominican Republic. (Gonzalez, a Miami businessman, grew up in Santo Domingo. As one of the project's founding residents, he sees himself as a sort of chaperon for Boykin and Celerie. "They come down here and dream these things up, and it's my job to make it work," he says.)

Conveniently, a billion-dollar embezzlement scandal, prolonged power failures, and rampant inflation had collapsed the Dominican peso, and brought the country to near-bankruptcy, prompting the I.M.F. to renew calls for the privatization of inessential state assets, chief among them a two-thousand-plus-acre proposed resort that had languished for years.

Curry's crowd is a Hamptons-going crowd, so a considerable component of the initial Playa Grande sales pitch involved playing up the convenience of the D.R. as an alternate A-list weekend refuge—"the *new* Hamptons," as Curry told me shortly after we first met. (By "new Hamptons," he later clarified, he meant "like the Hamptons were in the seventies.") Continental and American Airlines run frequent flights to the Dominican north shore that are, at least in theory, only three and a half hours long—surely no great deterrent for anyone accustomed to the Long Island Expressway.

In February of last year, Curry secured a private 737 jet for a weekend day trip to show the place off. For months, he had been asking acquaintances to name the ten New Yorkers they'd most like to invite to dinner, and, as the principal ingredient in his experiment in "creative meritocracy," he drew up a studiedly eclectic list of fifty people. Alongside the early movers (Moby, Rose, Zakaria), it included the New York Giants lineman Michael Strahan; the fashion-world scion Alex von Furstenberg; a former U.N. official, Nader Mousavizadeh; a couple of actors (Mariska Hargitay and Christopher Meloni, from "Law & Order: S.V.U."); Lee Bollinger, the president of Columbia University; and a New Jersey billboard executive named Drew Katz.



"We're off to the tweed bar."

"It's almost like you're a casting director," Alice Ryan said. "Some people have got leading roles, some people have got nonspeaking parts, and some people are just extras. But absolutely everyone who is part of the production is valuable." Ryan counselled Curry, drawing on her own experience in recruiting for SoHo House. "With SoHo House, it wasn't, like, 'Oh, you're Barry Diller, *of course* we want you to be a member,'" she said, by way of explanation. "It was, like, 'Oh, you're *Jamie King*. And you work at *Rockstar Games*. And you're at the helm of something which is an extraordinarily exciting *new venture*.'

"I think Boykin's been incredibly smart about how he has, quite frankly, just sorted out the riff from the raff," Ryan said. "He and Celerie—especially Celerie—have got such startlingly good taste, and not just that kind of good taste where it's, like, they know how to put a certain lamp with such and such a textile throw, and choose a paint color that's nice with the natural environment, but the practical aspect of putting together a place like that, and its feeling exceptionally special, but not so exceptionally special that it feels pretentious and you feel self-conscious."

The week before the trip, Curry looked over his invitation list. "It'll be interesting to see whether they interact," he said. "Do they like each other? Are there cliques? Or is it a bunch of people taking a free jet ride?"

The forecast called for rain, however, and Curry postponed the launch. ("A whole day of rain is unusual in the D.R.," he wrote, in an apologetic e-mail to the cast. "Now that you have some free time, I will be hosting a casual lunch on Saturday to watch the unfurling of The Gates, Christo's great project in Central Park. Our terrace on Central Park South should be a perfect vantage point.") When the time came for another try, three weeks later, clouds had reassembled over Playa Grande yet again. Scheduling conflicts had wilted the original guest list considerably: no Strahan, no Rose, no Moby, no Mousavizadeh, no Bollinger, no Zakaria (he was in Aspen), no Hargitay. Richard Meier, whose talents Curry hoped to enlist in designing the colony's artists' bungalows, cancelled on the morning in question, as did Rich Lowry, the editor of *National Review*.

Curry himself had flown down the

A CLIP

Harry Boyle's one-room, one-chimney house
With its settle bed was our first barber shop.
We'd go not for a haircut but "a clip":
Cold smooth creeping steel and snicking scissors,
The strong-armed chair, the plain mysteriousness
Of your sheeted self inside that neck-tied cope—
Half sleeveless surplice, half hoodless Ku Klux cape.
Harry Boyle's one-room, old bog-road house
Near enough to home but unfamiliar:
What was it happened there?
Weeds shoulder high up to the open door,
Harry not shaved, close breathing in your ear,
Loose hair in windfalls blown across the floor
Under the collie's nose. The collie's stare.

—*Seamus Heaney*

night before, to prepare, so Kemble read an announcement on the plane. "How would you create the perfect retreat?" she said. "Forget about economics. Come up with something where, twenty years from now, you'll say, 'Wow!' I want you all to think like master planners. We've given you all notebooks and pens. There are lots of creative people on board, so let's see what you come up with."

After the plane touched down at Puerto Plata, everyone was herded onto a bus, which drove a hundred yards to the edge of the runway, where people boarded helicopters in small groups. Shortly before two-thirty, the helicopters—there were ten—began descending on a large, flat patch of green marked with makeshift white "X"s: the Playa Grande driving range, dressed up with masking tape. Golf carts were available for the remaining leg of the voyage—another hundred or so yards—to the clubhouse, where lunch was already waiting and men in Hawaiian shirts carrying pineapple cocktails greeted the incoming guests.

Then, before anyone had finished eating, it began to rain, and Curry reluctantly cancelled the horses he'd reserved for those interested in exploring. Two hours passed, and it was time to go back to New York. Notebooks and pens were in scant evidence.

Six days later, many of the same crowd gathered, with greater cheer, in Palm Beach, at the family home where Kemble grew up, for the Curry-Kemble wedding. The occasion was supervised by the event planner Bronson van Wyck, an old Groton friend of Kemble's, and the bride's dress was designed by Lela Rose, a Playa Grande founding resident who had also designed Jenna Bush's Inaugural dress. This time, Florida defeated the D.R. handily—the weather was perfect. The ceremony featured elaborate fireworks, a designated "Keeper of the Dog" (Curry and Kemble have a Jack Russell terrier named Anchovie), and an ABBA cover band, and received a two-page spread in *Vogue*.

Curry is in for roughly fifty per cent of the over-all Playa Grande investment, with the bulk of the twenty co-founders pitching in about a million dollars each. (Moby, who says he is "not much of a beach person," told me that he was drawn to "the possibility of being involved in a development project that wasn't guided strictly by avarice.") But Curry retains one-hundred-per-cent control over all decision-making. Dominican utopia is a benevolent dictatorship. It is also, within the confines of its limited avarice, supposed to make a profit, or at least break even.

As initially drawn up by the landscape architects Hart Howerton, whom Curry hired last spring, Playa Grande is to have four main geographical components, two of them more pragmatic than idealistic. For avid golfers, villas will be built to accompany the course at the west end; a luxury boutique hotel, operated by the Singapore-based chain Aman Resorts, will occupy the property's eastern edge. (Aman's founder, Adrian Zecha, maintains a hotelier's version of the utopian spirit: "Our basic philosophy is not to impose man-made design on the land but, rather, to have the land tell us what we should be doing.") On the higher ground between them will be farms, an equestrian center, a science research facility, and a nature preserve. The artists' colony, for a hundred artists in all, will be closer to the central beach village: twenty-five bungalows sold as quarter shares, at a steep discount—about fifty thousand dollars. By "artist," Curry means "anyone who does something that's intellectually interesting that doesn't pay very well." (He cited the columnist George Will and the thinker Esther Dyson as examples of people whose work he finds intellectually interesting.) But the artist must also be clubbable. ("No interest in J. D. Salinger, aura notwithstanding.")

"It's kind of like a MacArthur Fellowship, only not quite as exciting to receive the call," Curry said. "Actually, maybe we'll just wait until the MacArthur list is announced, and approach people, saying, 'Here's what you can do with your five hundred thousand dollars.' "

Curry is aware of the spotty legacy, over time, of such Edenic retreats as the Bohemian Grove, north of San Francisco, and the Mill Reef Club, in Antigua. (The Grove, now best known for right-wing magnates urinating on redwoods, once boasted members like Mark Twain, Jack London, and John Muir, before settling into what the sociologist G. William Domhoff calls "a quid pro quo arrangement between the rich and the talented.") Curry's solution is to ensure that "even the financial people are special," by approaching them himself. (Antonio Weiss, a founding member who works at Lazard, is also on the board of the *Paris Review;* Roberto Sella, a hedge-fund manager, produces olive oil on a farm in Italy.) And for the colony he plans to rely on what he calls "the Harvard model, instead of the country-club model," whereby an independent board offers admission and tenure is granted. "Even if you fall from grace and your latest book is a joke, you have a place," Curry says. (Legacies, however, are forbidden.) So far, the admissions board is made up of Moby, the journalist

Lorne Manly, and Richard Meier, who, despite missing the jet trip, has signed on to the project with enthusiasm, relishing the "abnormal" opportunity, as he put it, to design a miniature city-state from scratch. "I don't know anyone else who's done *anything* like this," he said.

Last summer, in an act of public-spirited good will, Curry offered to host a cattle auction down by the beach at Playa Grande. The auction is an annual event in the largely agricultural north-coast region, almost a secular holiday, and several hundred local farmers showed up to eat, drink, trade, and listen to music under a canopy of trees just beyond the shore. While the auctioneer shouted rapidly into a microphone, in Spanish, Jorge Cavoli, the mayor of Cabrera, the nearest town to the east, sought out Curry in the crowd and said that he had a public beach in need of several hundred thousand dollars' worth of renovation following a recent hurricane. They arranged to see it the next day; in the meantime, Curry wanted to examine some newly cleared brush on the property, so he, Kemble, van Wyck, and some friends and I wandered off down the beach, in the direction of one of the cliffs. Scaling the rocks proved challenging, and Kemble suggested installing a funicular. "Funiculars are for old people," Curry said, bounding ahead. At the top, he took in the view. Looking west—perhaps two hundred yards away, on another cliff, was the edge of the golf course—he said he might like to build a giant rope bridge connecting the two spots. More fanciful notions followed, such as a zip-line extending directly north from the cliff, above the beach, and into the ocean: the perfect splash entrance. But everyone wanted to know what would go in the clearing itself. "This is an ideal spot for a marriage proposal," a friend of Kemble's suggested.

"Just think how many weddings I can have here," van Wyck said.

Curry, who had been regarding an architectural scheme that identified the clearing as the site of something called the "Jungle Club," was flustered. "You're cheesifying my perfect moment!" he said, and turned away, squatting to examine a freshly chopped tree stump that appeared to be crawling with insects. "Have you ever read E. O. Wilson's books?" he asked me. He hoped to persuade Wilson to serve on the board of the science center.

The only efficient way to see much of the mountainous, southernmost terrain at Playa Grande is on horseback, so we set off to meet a guide, Anja, who would lead a tour. We found the horses grazing on the side of the road, under the only partially watchful eye of Anja, who had already finished one of the two bottles of rum she'd brought along for the ride. The other bottle she stuck in her boot as she exhorted everyone, without any instruction or helmets, to climb on a horse. We rode first out along a densely forested promontory to the water's edge, and then up—steeply, treacherously—into the hills. Anja brought out the second bottle of rum and passed it around. The sun had begun to set, and the ocean, judging from the absolute quiet and stillness, might have been hundreds of miles distant, as we descended into a valley, surrounded by orange and mango trees.

Like other local politicians in poor economies, Mayor Cavoli, who is thirty-seven and looks and dresses like a Miami accountant, is more interested in development than in enlightened preservation. He seemed unenthusiastic about the prospect of rerouting the highway. "I'll have to study it," he said, when I brought it up.

The day after the auction, while driving Curry and me to a recently restored cove—hints of what a little largesse could achieve—Cavoli drew attention to the smooth conditions of a side street and said, "We have paved these roads. Before, it was like the Old West." Then he called out, "Hey, who's that guy on the truck?," and pointed to the side of a large garbage rig, which was emblazoned with a smiling image of his face.

As we drove on, Cavoli described a plan of his own, which involved building a *malacon*, or promenade, along a desolate stretch of oceanfront rocks, which he hoped would spur still more commercial development. The hitch: it might cost half a million dollars to build. Curry, assuming his role as future employer and caretaker, asked about income taxes, wages, and health care. The immediate impetus for these questions was Anja, the horse guide, who had charmed everyone with her easygoing manner. It would be some time—years, at this rate—before leading horse tours around the property amounted to a full-time job at Playa Grande, and Curry hoped to find some other chores for her to do. ("Maybe she can drive people to the airport and back," van Wyck suggested, perhaps unwisely.)

A couple of weeks later, Curry sent me an e-mail:

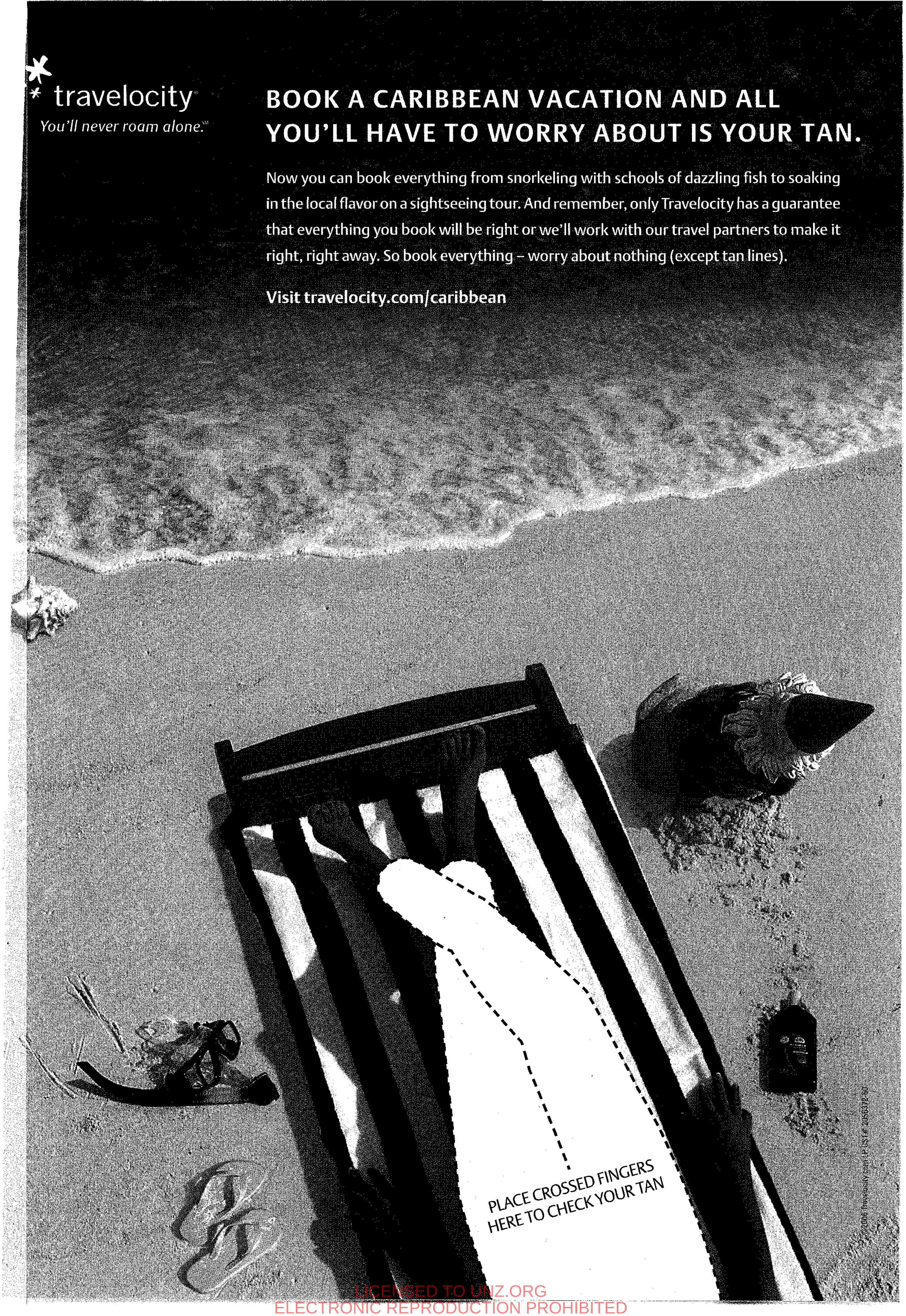
> We have been talking further with Mayor Jorge of Cabrera, and have decided to help with the promenade and to endow an ongoing performance program every Friday evening. The performances will mix high and low, with classical music and outdoor films alternating each week with Dominican and pop bands. I think that will change the entire feel of the town.

Curry also authorized his utopia's first three capital investments: the 1,082-volume collection of Penguin classics, for an eventual Playa Grande library; an entire art installation from the P.S. 1 gallery, in Queens; and new irrigation equipment for the golf course.

"The project is like a creature: it's mutating and changing every day," the avant-garde architect Hernan Diaz Alonso told me, shortly after returning from a trip to Playa Grande in July. (Alonso, who calls Curry "a visionary," is the designer of the giant P.S. 1 installation—a "swirling composition of aluminum pipes and billowing fabric," according to the *Times*—that must now, somehow, be transported to the Caribbean.) Alonso was accompanied on the trip by Scott Johnson, a colleague of Richard Meier's. "We could really just jam about ideas and experiences," Johnson said. "I'd pick up this incredible leaf thing, and give it to Alonso and say, 'Hey, this is something you would be interested in,' because he comes at it from such a different approach. So it was like an exchange of ideas and creativity. I just want to be creative there."

Meier himself finally flew down in August, and raved about the Dominican citizenry, among other things: "They're very friendly and calm. They're always smiling all the time. Very happy people."

On the morning of December 31st, in Cabrera, Curry leaned out his car window to chastise a Dominican man for littering, and wound up in a shouting match. (Curry knows no



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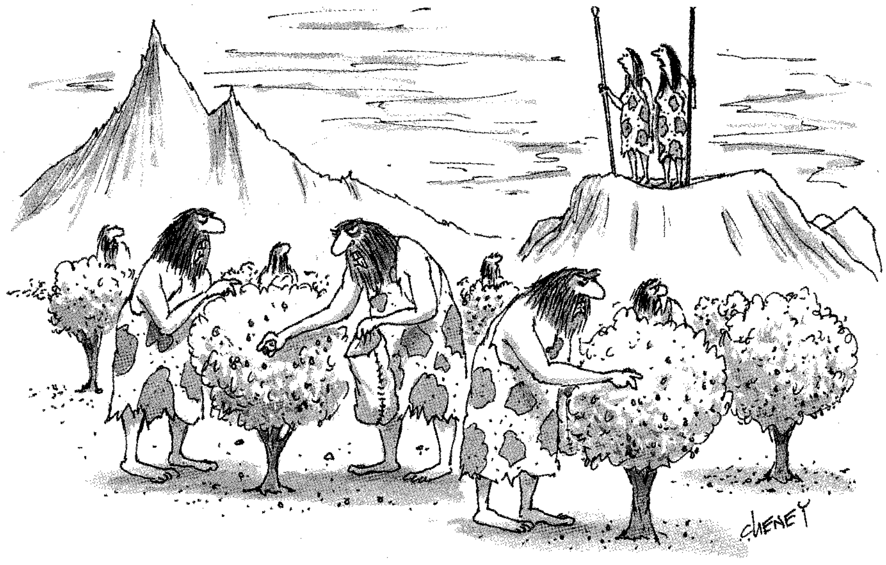


"I still don't see what harm could come from allowing males to possess weapons."

• •

Spanish; the Dominican knew enough English to respond, "Fuck you!") "Now I'm waiting for my Larry David moment," Curry said. "When the guy turns up on the town land-use commission."

He had a couple of bruises on his forehead from several days of boogie-boarding. He and Kemble had been down at Playa Grande since Christmas, entertaining sixty-odd guests—the biggest group yet—including some young children, and Anchovie. (The kids, one visitor remarked, all seemed to have exotic names, too: Dante, Heathcliff, Emerson.) Most of the guests were staying together at a hillside hotel in Cabrera that Curry had reserved for the week, and convening at regular intervals to share meals cooked by a rotation of chefs he'd flown in from New York. Charlie Rose had dropped by the previous day to play a round of golf before climbing into a helicopter bound for a resort on the opposite side of the island.

Earlier that week, Curry had closed on the purchase of the Occidental hotel, and with any luck the bulldozers would be arriving to level the place by the end of the peak season—say, April. He had also signed an agreement with the government's Environmental Ministry to co-manage the science center. ("We'll pay for building the center, and they'll pay for the scientists," he said. "Actually, we'll probably end up paying for that, too.") President Fernández had lent his moral support, at least, to the rerouting of the highway.

Curry had been looking forward to New Year's Eve as an occasion to demonstrate his commitment to the native community. He intended to throw a party for the residents of Cabrera: fireworks in the town's central square, followed by an open bar. Mayor Cavoli quickly nixed this, and suggested as an alternate location the site of his proposed *malacon*.

Curry, Kemble, and Delio Gonzalez, the self-appointed realist, planned first to drop in on some friends for lunch on Turks and Caicos, near the Bahamas, which required taking a helicopter and then a small plane, affording plenty of time for year-end reflection. Richard Meier's office had recently produced a sort of fluid city plan, for the five hundred acres nearest the main beach, and included with it sample home designs, such as a studio "cube," equipped with solar panels, and a modernist tree house, allowing even for the possibility, in some cases, of submerging buildings into the slope, leaving earthen roofs. (Kemble, who has wrested control of all matters relating to materials, colors, and patterns, issued a veto on the idea of exclusively white houses, which are a Meier signature.) Curry was pleased by the irregularly appointed sculpture gardens throughout the plan, which reminded him, he said, of "drunken British squares," but he couldn't conceal a general sense of letdown. "The thing that always disappoints me when I look at all these designs is that my vision of utopia doesn't ever include setting aside a place to park your car, for example. It's, like, utopia, you know? You should be eating ambrosia off the trees."

"Yeah, but where does the shit go?" Gonzalez said.

Curry began leafing through a magazine. It was *The Next American City*. As is his habit, he underlined and made notes in the margins. "Look at this," he said, stopping to point out a passage about "New Babylon," as conceived by a Dutch artist named Constant Nieuwenhuys. "It says here that utopia is . . . Minneapolis!"

At one point during the trip, I happened to notice a mangled single-engine Cessna in an airport hangar, and suggested that it might be fun to plant a phony plane wreck somewhere back at Playa Grande for people to discover.

"You say that as a joke," Curry replied. "But that's actually a really good idea."

Kemble was less impressed. "Someone already did that," she said. "It's called 'Fantasy Island.'"

Later in the afternoon, it became clear that Curry was seriously entertaining the idea of moving the junked plane over a hundred miles of winding mountain roads. He gestured toward a specific patch of woods and asked me what I thought of the site. Gonzalez intervened before I could answer. "You know what, Boykin?" he said. "Let me handle this one, O.K.?"

Curry and his guests had been blessed with perfect weather all week, and although it poured early in the evening, at cocktail time the rain stopped abruptly. People arrived at the clubhouse dressed in Caribbean semiformal: sandals, sundresses for the women and linen ensembles for the men. Blocks of ice spelled out "2006" beside a vast spread of caviar—nice, tropical touches—while, not far behind, an impaled pig roasted slowly, snout facing west.

Plastic champagne flutes were passed out between dessert courses. (Each chef had contributed a plate.) One of Cury's groomsmen, a journalist turned venture capitalist named Mark Colodny, stood to toast the hosts; Curry, professing an aversion to being the center of attention, declined an invitation to speak himself. A bit later in the evening, as we all stood around holding our drinks, Celerie confided that the Playa Grande project had become, in effect, Boykin's second wife. "I'll give her three years," she said. "And then I'll slit her throat."

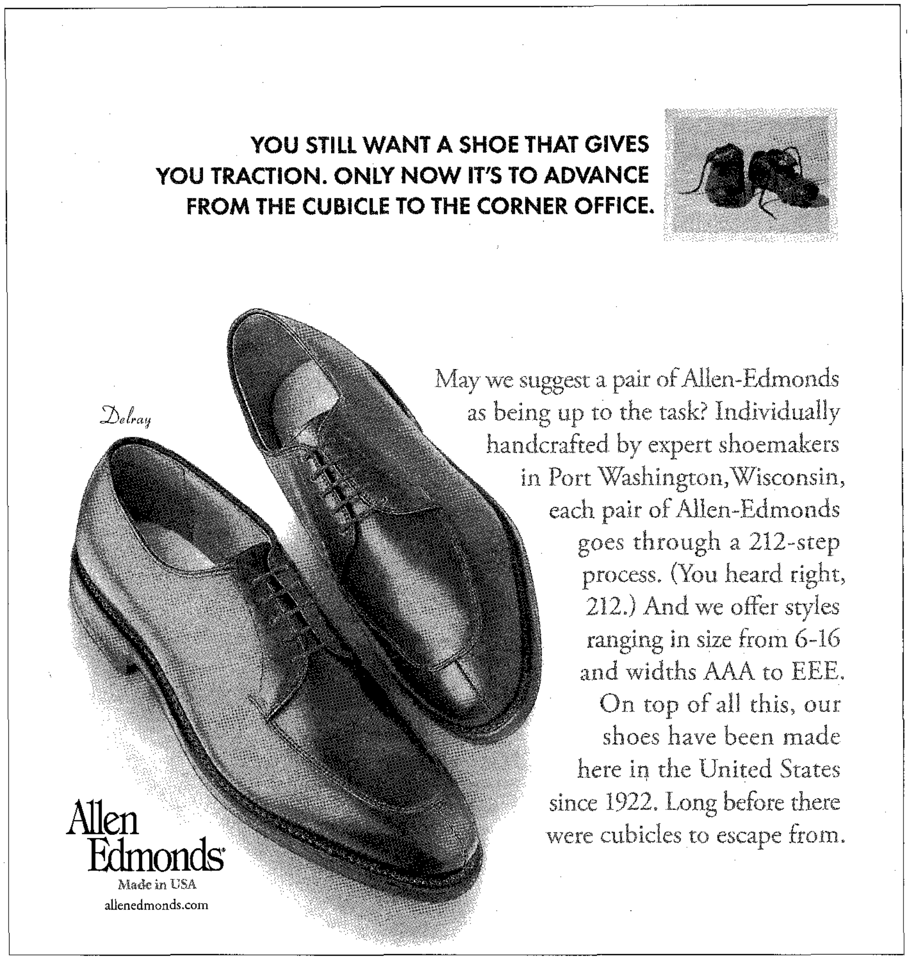
As it was getting on near eleven-thirty, the Americans, flutes in hand, boarded a bus and rode into town, past the central square, and then bore right toward the waterfront, arriving finally at a barren spit of rocks and tall grass: the future gem of Cabrera.

Mayor Cavoli, dressed in pressed jeans and a plaid shirt, was already on hand, along with his wife, who was much younger. A folding table, covered with cloth, became a bar, tended by Playa Grande employees. (There are now a hundred of them, recognizable by their bright white shirts and cheery, if sometimes bewildered, demeanors.) Streetlights, owing to a perpetually overworked electric grid, rarely shine in Cabrera, and even though the sky appeared miraculously cloud-free, it was easy, in the dim glow provided by the stars, to overlook the imposing rows of canisters, lined up like mini-rockets, not twenty yards from where a merengue band was just setting up.

Midnight must have struck, because off in the distance sporadic white flashes were replaced by a steady strobe, punctuated by faint whistling. Curry, not knowing quite what to expect from the pyrotechnic crew he'd paid to fly in from Santo Domingo, wondered if these weren't his fireworks, exploding over the town square. Then came a sonic boom, and, as the purpose of the nearby canisters became apparent, the ground seemed almost to shake underneath our feet.

Shock (at the decibel level) gave way to wonderment (at the expanse of each plume), perhaps followed by bemusement, and then clear alarm, as a stream of embers began falling directly upon us. But the embers flared harmlessly in the grass. More champagne.

"Note to self," Curry announced. "Next year, shoot the fireworks out over the water." ♦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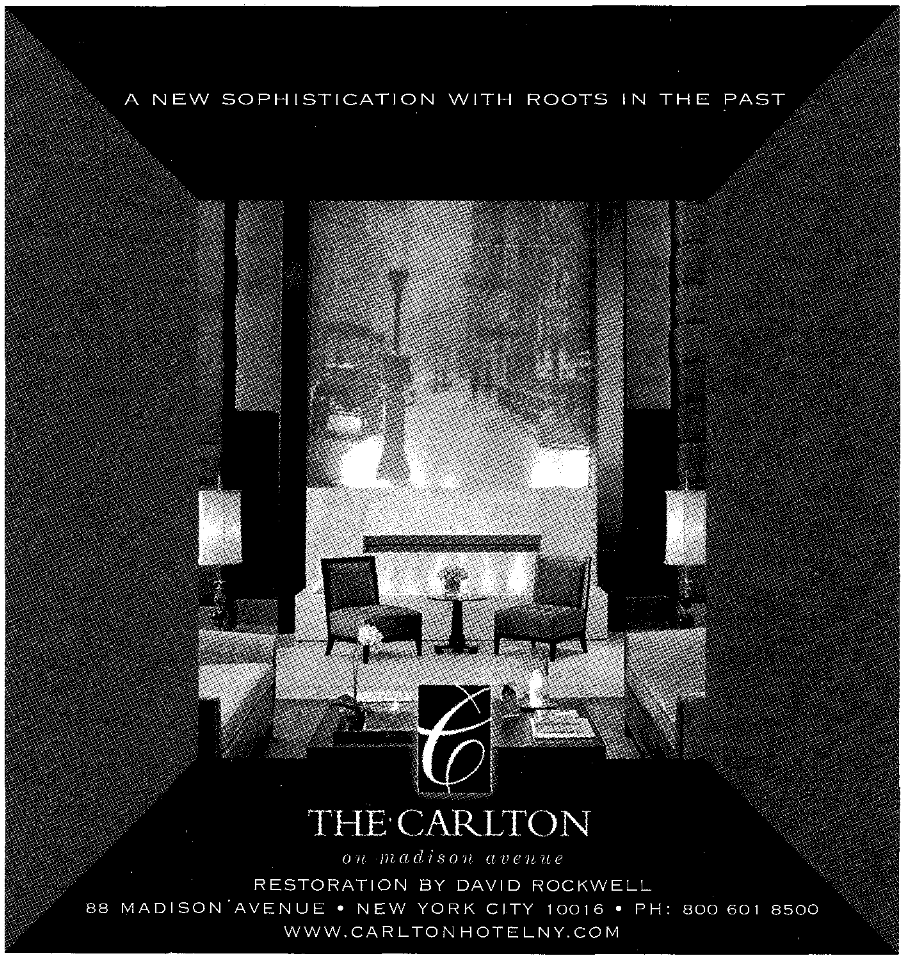
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FICTION

GLEASON

BY LOUISE ERDRICH

DETAIL: ERAN BENDHEIM, "CHATUL OPERATION" (2001)

John Stregg opened his front door wide and there was Gleason, his girlfriend Jade's little brother. The boy stood, frail and skinny, in the snow with a sad look on his face and a gun in his hand. As the president of the New Otto Bank, of New Otto, North Dakota, Stregg had trained his employees to stay relaxed in situations like this. Small-town banks were vulnerable, and Stregg had actually been held up twice. One of the robbers had even been a methamphetamine addict. He did not flinch now.

"What can I do for you?" he said to Gleason. His voice was loud and calm. His wife, Carmen, was reading in the living room.

"You can come with me, Mr. Stregg," Gleason said, leading slightly to the left with the barrel of the gun. Behind him, at the curb, a low-slung Oldsmobile idled. Stregg could see no one else in it. Gleason was just nineteen years old, and Stregg now wished that he'd joined the Army as Jade had said he was threatening to do. Except that, if he had, he might be carrying something better than an old, jammed-looking .22-calibre pistol. From the living room Carmen called, "Who is it?," and Gleason whispered, "Say 'Kids selling candy.' "

"Kids selling candy," Stregg called back.

"Tell them we don't want any," Carmen yelled.

"Say you're going for a little walk," Gleason said.

"I'm going for a little walk."

"In this snow?" his wife cried. "You're crazy!"

"Put your coat on," Gleason said. "So she doesn't see it still hanging on the rack. Then come with me. Shut the door."

As he headed down the walkway with Gleason behind him, Stregg began to hope that he would find Jade hidden in the car. That this was some odd kind of prank. Some desperate way for her to get to see him. It was evening, and the windows of his house cast a soft, golden ligh all the way down the landscaped twist o paving stones. There was a band of utter darkness where a stone wall and close-grown arborvitae cast a shadow onto the boulevard. The car sat beyond that, in the wintry shimmer of a street lamp.

"Get in," Gleason said.

Stregg stumbled a bit in the icy snow, then let himself into the passenger's side. The back seat was empty, he saw. Gleason held the pistol just inside the sleeve of his large topcoat, and kept it pointed at the windshield as he rounded the front of the car and ducked quickly into the driver's seat.

"I'm going to ease out of this light," he said.

Gleason kept his gun out and his mild eyes trained on Stregg as he put the car in drive and rolled forward into the darkness beyond the street lamp's glow.

"Time to talk." He put the car in park.

Gleason was a nervous-looking boy with large brown eyes, a thin face, and a mop of toast-brown hair flopping over one eye and bending into his collar. There were little wisps of down on his chin. He was artistic. This sort of behavior, Stregg knew, did not come naturally to Gleason. He'd probably had to get slightly drunk in order to drive to the Stregg residence with a gun and ring the bell. And what would he have done if Carmen had answered? Would he have pretended to be selling candy bars for some high-school trip? Did he have a Plan B? Stregg stared at Gleason's gaunt little face. The boy didn't seem likely to put a bullet in him. Plus, his hands looked too weak to pull back the slide. Stregg knew, too, that his presence in Gleason's car had depended on some implicit collaboration on his own part.

"So," Stregg repeated, in the patient voice he used with jumpy investors, "what can I do for you?"

"I think a hundred thousand dollars should be just about right," Gleason said.

"A hundred thousand dollars."

Gleason was silently expectant. Stregg shivered a little, then he pulled his coat tightly around himself and felt like crying. He had cried a lot with Jade. She had brought all his tears up to the surface. Sometimes they rushed out, and sometimes they trickled in long tracks down his cheeks.

She'd said that there was no shame in

it, and she'd cried along with him until their weeping slowed erotically and sent them careening through each other's body, toward a dark peace. Stregg heard himself make a sound, an *Ah* of doubt. There was something about the monetary figure that struck him as wretched.

"It's just not enough," he said.

Gleason looked perplexed.

"Look, if she keeps the baby—and you know I want her to keep the baby—she's going to need a house. Maybe in Fargo, you know? A hundred thousand isn't enough for a decent house. And then there are clothes, and, what, car seats, that sort of thing. I've never had a child, but I know they need certain equipment. Also, she needs a good, safe car. A hundred thousand isn't enough for everything. It's not a future."

"O.K.," Gleason said, after a while. "What do you suggest?"

"Besides," Stregg went on, thinking out loud, "the thing is, in for a penny in for a pound. A hundred thousand would be missed just as much as a larger amount would be. My wife sees our accounts. It might as well be . . . Let me think. If it's under half a million, the papers will say nearly half a million anyway. So it might as well be over half a million. But not seven hundred thousand, because they'll call that three-quarters of a million. So let's say six hundred thousand."

Gleason was quiet. "That's just over half a million," he said finally.

Stregg nodded. "See? But that's a doable thing. Only there has to be a reason. A very good reason."

"Well," Gleason said, "maybe you were going to start some kind of business?"

Stregg looked at Gleason in surprise. "Well, yes, that's good, a business. Only then we'd need to actually have the business, keep it going, make a paper trail, and that'd lead to more deception, and the taxes . . . It'd all lead back to me. It's too complicated. We need one catastrophic reason."

"A tornado," Gleason said. "I mean, in winter, maybe not. A blizzard."

"And where does the money come in?"

"The money gets lost in the blizzard?"

Stregg looked disappointed, and Gleason shrugged weakly.

They both cast about for a time, mulling this over. Then Gleason said, "Question."

"Yes?"

"How come you don't just get divorced from your wife and marry Jade? The way you're talking, it sounds to me like you love her. So maybe I didn't have to come here and threaten you with this." He wagged the gun. "But I'm not getting why you don't just leave your wife and run off with Jade, or something, if you love her."

"I do love her."

"Then what's the problem?"

"Look at me, Gleason." Stregg put his hands out. "Do you think she'd stay with me just for me? Now, be honest. Without the money. Without the job. Just me."

Gleason shrugged again. "You're not so bad, man."

"Yes, I am," Stregg said. "I'm sixteen years older than Jade and I'm half bald. If I had my hair, then maybe, or if I was good-looking or athletic. But I'm a realist. I see what I am. The money helps. I'm not saying that that's the only reason Jade cares for me, not at all—Jade is a pure soul—but the money helps. If I divorced Carmen now, I wouldn't have a job. I took the bank over from her father, who is, yes, in his nineties and in a nursing home, but perfectly lucid. Carmen is a fifty-one-per-cent shareholder. Besides, here's the thing. Carmen has done nothing wrong. She has never, to my knowledge, betrayed me with another man, nor has she neglected me, within her own powers. Until I met Jade last year, you understand, I was reasonably happy. Carmen and I had sex for twenty minutes once a week and went to Florida in the winter; we gave dinner parties and stayed at the lake for two weeks every summer. In the summer, we had sex twice a week and I cooked all our meals."

Gleason looked uncomfortable.

"The thing is, we're the last small, independent bank in this part of the state and pretty soon we'll get bought out, swallowed up. That will change my situation. I'd like to be with Jade. I plan to be with Jade. When I can. If she'll have me."

Now Stregg leaned searchingly toward Gleason. "What does your presence here mean, exactly? Did she send you?"

"No."

"What happened? She won't talk to me right now, you know."

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"Well, she told me about her being pregnant. She was kind of upset, and I thought you were ditching her. That's what I thought. You know, it's always been just the two of us. She raised me after our mother O.D.'d. I was only eleven when it happened, and she was twenty-one. I'd die for her."

"Of course," Stregg said. "Of course you would. Let that be our bond, Gleason. Both of us would die for her. But here's the thing. Only one of us—right now, anyway—only one of us can provide for her."

"So what should we do?"

"Something has come to me," Stregg said. "Now, I'm going to propose something that may surprise you. It may seem bizarre, but give it a chance, hear me out, Gleason, because I think it will work. Are you ready?"

Gleason nodded.

"Say you kidnap my wife."

Gleason gave a strangled yelp.

"No, just listen. Tomorrow night you do the very same thing as tonight. You come to the door. Carmen answers. You show her the gun and you come into the house. You have some strapping tape. A pair of scissors. At gunpoint, you order me to tie Carmen up. Once she's taken care of, you tie me up and say to me, in her hearing, that if I don't deliver six hundred thousand dollars in cash to you by the next day you'll kill her. You have to say that, I'm afraid. Then you bring her out to the car—not this car, a rental. Don't let her see the license plates."

"I don't think so," Gleason said. "I think you're describing a federal crime."

"Well, yes," Stregg said. "But is it really a crime if nothing happens? I mean, you'll be really, really nice to Carmen. That's a given. You'll take her to a secure out-of-town location, like your house. Keep her blindfolded. Put her in the back bedroom where you keep the freezer. Lay down a mattress so she's comfortable. It'll just be for a day. I'll drop off the money. Then you'll let her out somewhere on the other side of town. She may have a long walk—be sure she brings shoes and a coat. I don't think we should tell Jade."

"Jade's gone, anyway."

Stregg's heart lurched. He'd somehow known it. "Where?" he managed to ask.

"Her friend Bonnie took her to Bismarck, just to clear her head. They'll be back on Friday."

"Oh, then this is perfect," Stregg said.

Gleason looked at him with great, silent eyes. His and Jade's eyes were very similar, Stregg thought, and he suddenly felt extremely sorry for Gleason. He was so wimpy, so young, and what would he do with Carmen? She worked out on a stationary bicycle and lifted free weights. Gleason kept shifting the gun from hand to hand, probably because his wrist was getting tired.

"By the way, where did that gun come from?" Stregg asked.

"It used to belong to my mother's boyfriend."

"Is it loaded?"

"Of course it is."

"You don't have ammunition for it, do you?" Stregg said. "But that's good. We don't want any accidents."

When Gleason knocked on the door the following evening, John Stregg pretended to have fallen asleep. His heart beat wildly as the quiet transaction occurred in the entryway. Then Carmen walked into the room with her arms out in front of her and her square honest face blanched in shock. She made a gesture to her husband, asking for help, but Stregg was looking at Gleason and trying not to give everything away by laughing. Gleason wore a cinnamon-brown knitted ski mask with white piping around the mouth, nose, and eyes. His coat and his pants were a baked-looking brown. He looked like a scrawny gingerbread boy, except that he was wearing surgical gloves.

"I'm going to throw up," Carmen moaned when Gleason ordered Stregg to tie her up.

"No, you'll be O.K.," Stregg said. "You'll be O.K." Tears dripped down his face and onto her hands as he tried firmly but gently to do his job. His wife's hands were so beautifully cared for, the nails lacquered with soft peach. Let nothing go wrong, he prayed.

"Look, he's crying," Carmen said accusingly to Gleason, before her husband tied a scarf between her teeth, knotting it tightly behind her head. "Nnnnnn!"

"I'm sorry," Stregg said.

"Now it's your turn," Gleason said.

The two of them suddenly realized that Gleason would have to put down the gun and somehow subdue Stregg, and their eyes got very wide. They stared at each other.

"Sit down in that chair," Gleason said at last. "Take the tape and loop it around your legs." He proceeded to instruct Stregg in how to do most of the work himself. He even had him cut strips to the appropriate length, all of which Stregg thought was quite ingenious of Gleason.

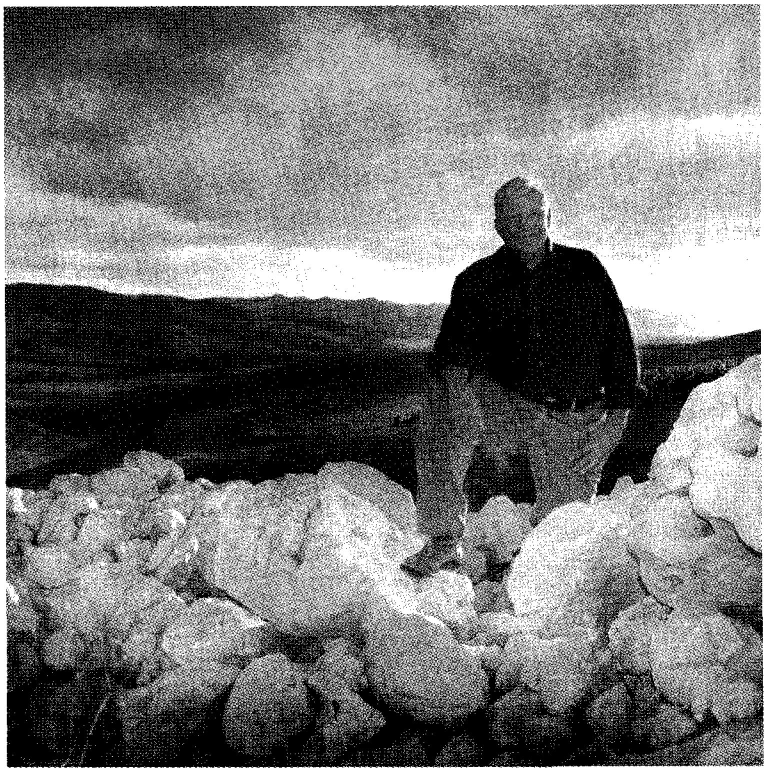
Once Stregg had secured himself to the chair and Gleason had gagged him, Gleason told Carmen to get on her feet. But she refused. Even as anxiety coursed through him, Stregg felt obscurely proud of his wife. She rolled around on the floor, kicking like a dolphin, until Gleason finally pounced on her and pressed the barrel of the gun to her temple. Straddling her, he untied the gag in her mouth and rummaged in his pocket. He drew out a couple of pills.

"You leave me no choice," he said. "I'm going to have to ask you to dry-swallow these."

"What are they?" Carmen asked.

"Just sedatives," Gleason said. Then he spoke to Stregg. "Leave six hundred thousand dollars in a garbage bag next to the 'Adopted by the Flickertail Club' highway sign. No marked bills. No police. Or I'll kill your wife. You're being watched."

Stregg was surprised that Carmen took the pills, but then for some reason she'd always been that way about taking pills—a willing patient. Now she turned out to be a willing hostage, and Gleason had no more trouble with her. He cut the tape on her legs and put a hobble on her ankles. She walked out dreamily, her coat draped over her shoulders, and Stregg was left alone. It took him about half an hour of patient wiggling to release himself from the tape, which he left looped around the chair. Now what? He wanted desperately to call Jade, to talk to her, to hear the slow music of her voice. But for some hours he sat on the couch with his head in his hands, replaying the whole scenario. Then he started thinking ahead. Tomorrow he would go in early. He would transfer money from their retirement account into the bank's general account. Then



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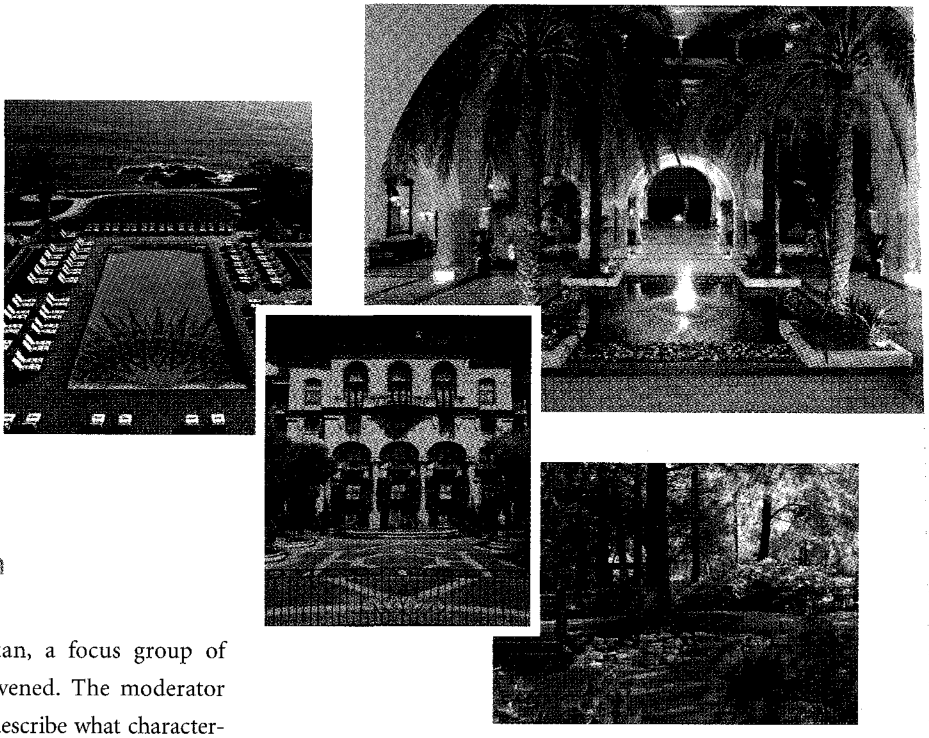

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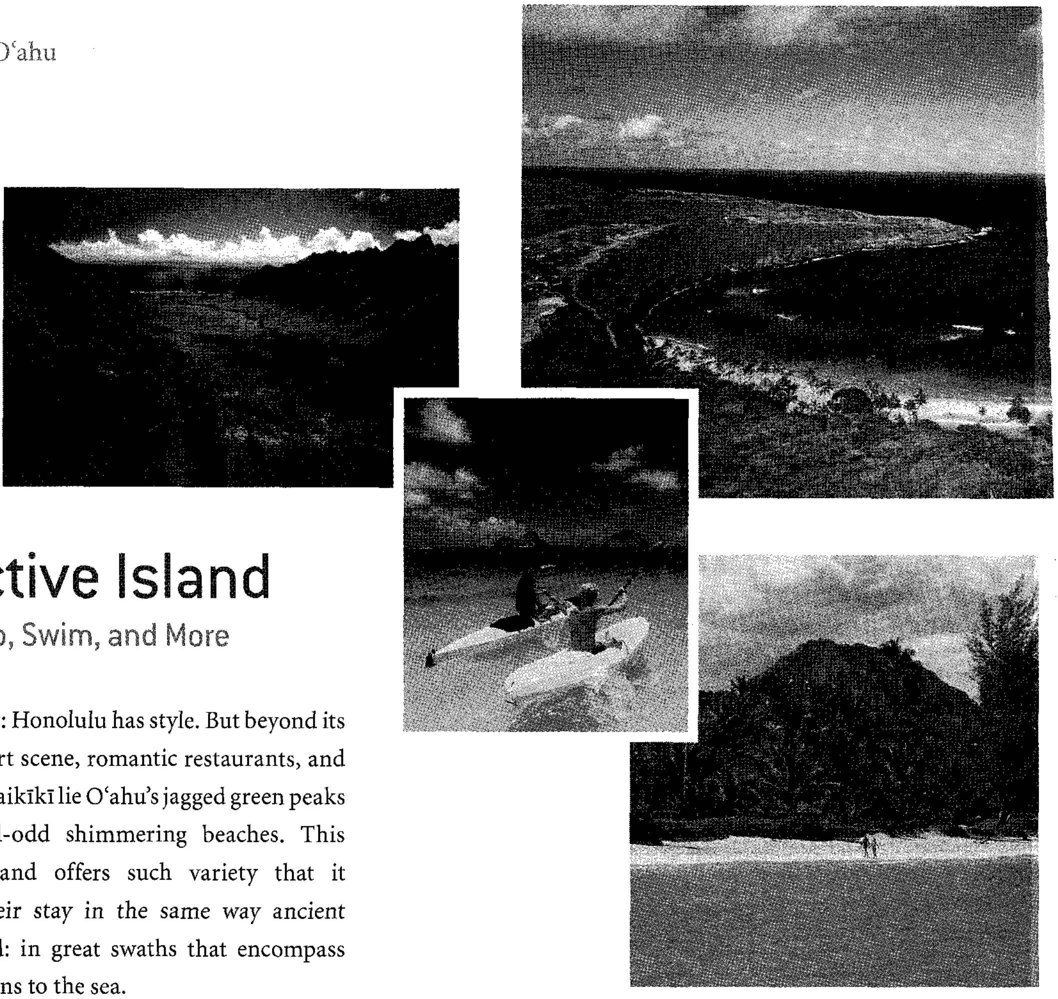

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The word is out: Honolulu has style. But beyond its burgeoning art scene, romantic restaurants, and revitalized Waikīkī lie O‘ahu’s jagged green peaks and hundred-odd shimmering beaches. This Hawaiian island offers such variety that it beckons visitors to plan their stay in the same way ancient Hawaiians tended their land: in great swaths that encompass everything from the mountains to the sea.

The lush **Pali Highway** crosses the Ko‘olau Mountains into Kailua, a beachside hamlet where celebrities make their homes. Those venturing out here can windsurf or kayak the calm waters to offshore islands. “When you’re on an island by yourself looking at O‘ahu, it’s amazing,” says Steve Haumschild, a manager at Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks (kailuasailboards.com).

O‘ahu has nearly six hundred surf spots, the most in the state, but the soft sands of **Waikīkī** make it the best place to learn. Daredevils who want to live the surf culture should head to the **North Shore**, where the world’s best surfers gather every winter at spots such as **Waimea Bay** and **Sunset Beach** to cruise twenty-foot-plus waves (Hans Hedemann Surf School, hhsurf.com).

Snorkeling and diving get you under the water to a different kind of action. Parrot fish and octopi roam **Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve** (hanaumabayhawaii.org), where romantic night snorkels are popular with the locals. Schools of puffer fish and graceful spotted eagle rays—often as many as a dozen—hover around the M/V Mahi, a former minesweeper sunk over twenty years ago to create an artificial diving reef (Aaron’s Dive Shop, hawaii-scuba.com). To catch a fish—from the goldfish-like *menpachi* to a thousand-pound marlin—book a fishing cruise or a private charter with Sportfish Hawaii (sportfishhawaii.com).

Here sun and sand get the glory, but O‘ahu has plenty to please the landlubber, too. Ride horseback at a four-thousand-acre working ranch located in the cinematically beautiful **Ka‘a‘awa Valley** (Kualoa Ranch, kualoa.com). Or try a mountain bike. A wide variety of trails and paths crisscross the island, offering anything from a downhill cruise on paved roads to mudslinging off-road extravaganzas (Bike Hawaii, bikehawaii.com).

A climb through the crater at Diamond Head starts the day right. Or head east to **Makapu‘u Point**, where an easy, paved hike precedes the real adventure: a cliff-side descent to a lava ledge pocked with tide pools. Even the soft-adventure lovers can find something to please. Ecotours from such groups as Oahu Nature Tours (oahunaturetours.org) and Mauka Makai Excursions (hawaiianecotours.net) offer comfortable, air-conditioned access to sacred sites, waterfalls, and rainforests. Or enjoy the outdoor living room called Sunset on the Beach on Saturday or Sunday evenings, where everyone grabs a patch of sand, a take-out supper, and watches the sun go down over **Waikīkī** before the movies roll on a thirty-foot screen under the stars (sunsetonthebeach.net).

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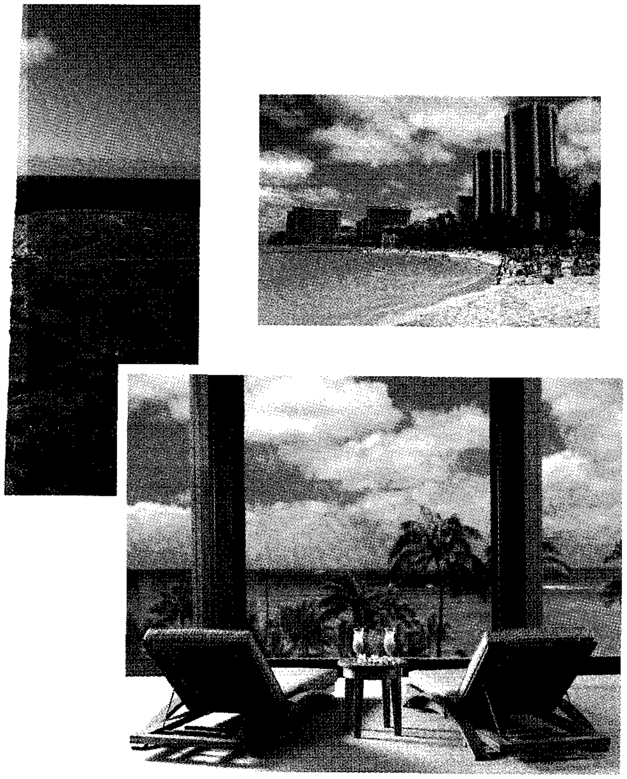

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After climbing, hiking, and swimming O'ahu, head for the **Nā Hō'ola Spa** at **The Hyatt Regency Waikiki Resort & Spa** (waikiki.hyatt.com) where the hot stones and long strokes of a *lomi pōhaku* massage will melt those knots. Afterwards, decompress in the "relaxation room," where the panoramic view of surfers and lazy catamarans will hypnotize half-closed eyes.

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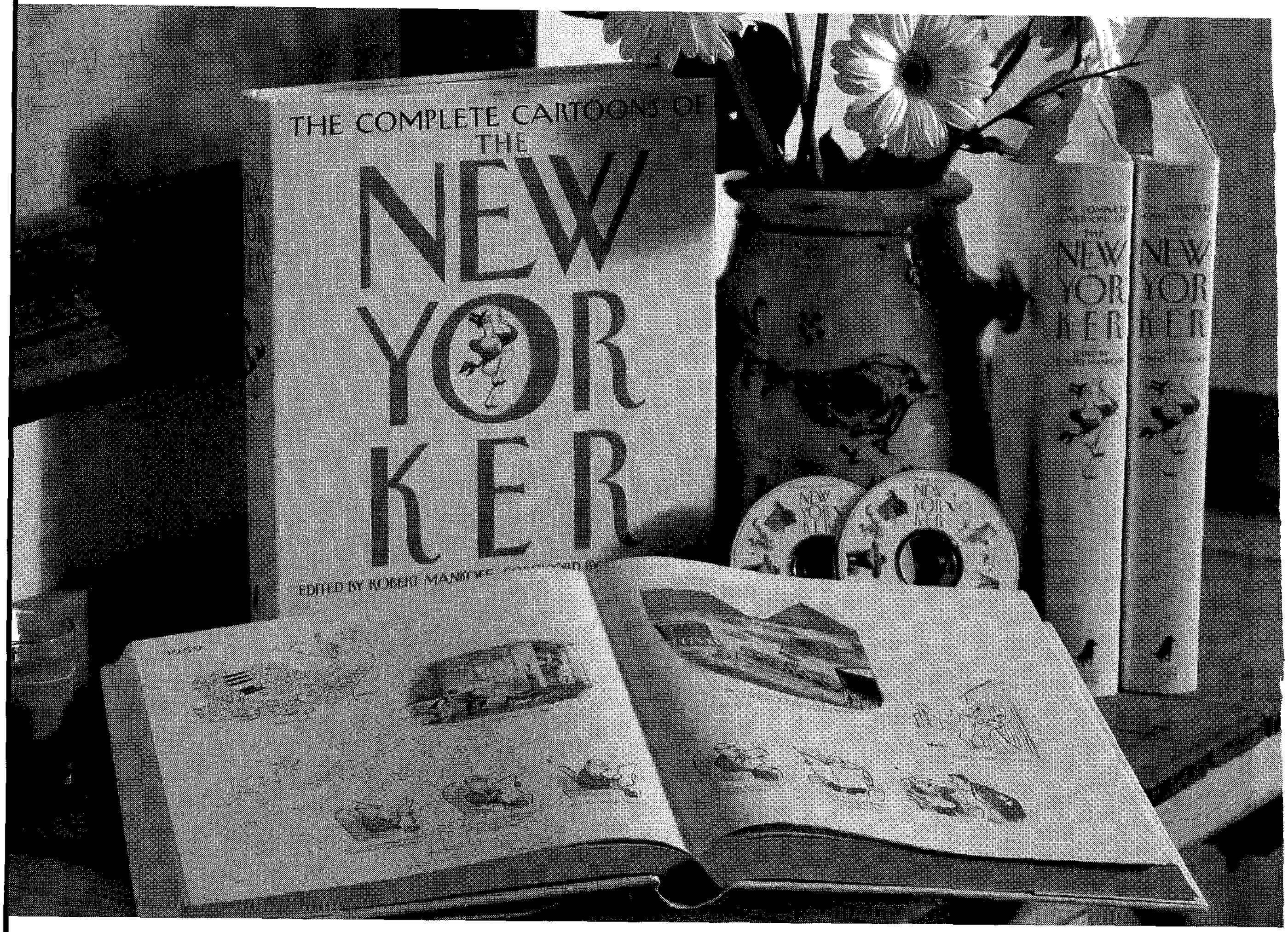
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EDITED BY ROBERT MANKOFF

THE COMPLETE CARTOONS OF THE NEW YORKER

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Edited by Robert Mankoff
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With essays by Roger Angell, Nancy Franklin, Ian Frazier, Rebecca Mead, Lillian Ross, Mark Singer, Calvin Trillin, and John Updike.

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he would go into the safe and take out the cash and get into the car. He would drive out to the highway sign and make the drop. It would all be done before 9 A.M., then Gleason would free Carmen west of town, where she could walk home or find a ride. There would be police. An investigation. Newspapers. But no insurance was involved.

The amount wasn't excessive. It would use up most of their retirement account, but Carmen still had the bank. It would all blow over.

A blizzard came up and Carmen got lost and might have frozen to death had a farmer not pulled her from a ditch. Luckily, Gleason had scooped up her snow boots as they left, and her coat was one of those long down coats, quilted past her knees. She suffered no frostbite, and though she ran a fever for six days, she did not develop pneumonia. Stregg nursed her with care, waited on her hand and foot, took a leave from the bank. He was shocked by how the kidnapping had affected her. Over the next weeks, she lost a great deal of weight and spoke irrationally. To the police she described her abductor as quite large, muscular, with firm hands, a big nose, and a deep voice. Her kidnapper was stunningly handsome, she said, a god! It was all so strange that Stregg almost felt like correcting her. Though he was delighted, on the one hand, that she had the description so wrong, her embroidery disturbed him. And when he brought her home from the hospital she was so restless. In the evenings, she wanted to talk instead of watching television or reading the many magazines that she subscribed to. She had questions.

"Do you love me?"

"Of course I love you."

"Do you really, really love me? I mean, would you have died for me if the kidnapper had made you make a choice? 'It's her or you'—say he'd said that. Would you have stepped forward?"

"I was tied to the chair," Stregg said.

"Metaphorically."

"Of course, metaphorically. I would have."

"I wonder."

She began to look at him skeptically, measuring him. At night, now, she wanted lots of reassurance. She seduced him and scared him, saying things like "Make me helpless."

"He made me helpless," she said one morning. "But he was kind, very kind to me."

Stregg took her to the doctor, who said that it was post-traumatic stress and prescribed antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications, which didn't help much.

"Hold me tighter—squeeze the breath out of me."

"Look at me. Don't close your eyes."

"Don't say something meaningless. I want the truth."

It was terrifying, how she'd opened up. What had Gleason done?

Nothing, Gleason insisted on the phone. Stregg was ashamed to feel repelled by his wife's awkward need—it was no different from his own need. If she'd been this way before, he recognized, he might have responded. He might not have turned to Jade. He might have been amazed, grateful. But when Carmen threw herself onto him at night he felt only despair, and she could sense his distance. She grew bony and let her hair go gray, long, unruly, beautiful. She was strange. She was sinking. She looked at him with the eyes of a drowning person.

Stregg went to visit his father-in-law at the nursing home. The place did not depress him, though he could see how it might depress others. His father-in-law was resting on his single bed, on top of a flowered polyester coverlet. He'd pulled an afghan over himself, one that Carmen had knitted, in intricate stripes of green and blue. He was listening to the radio.

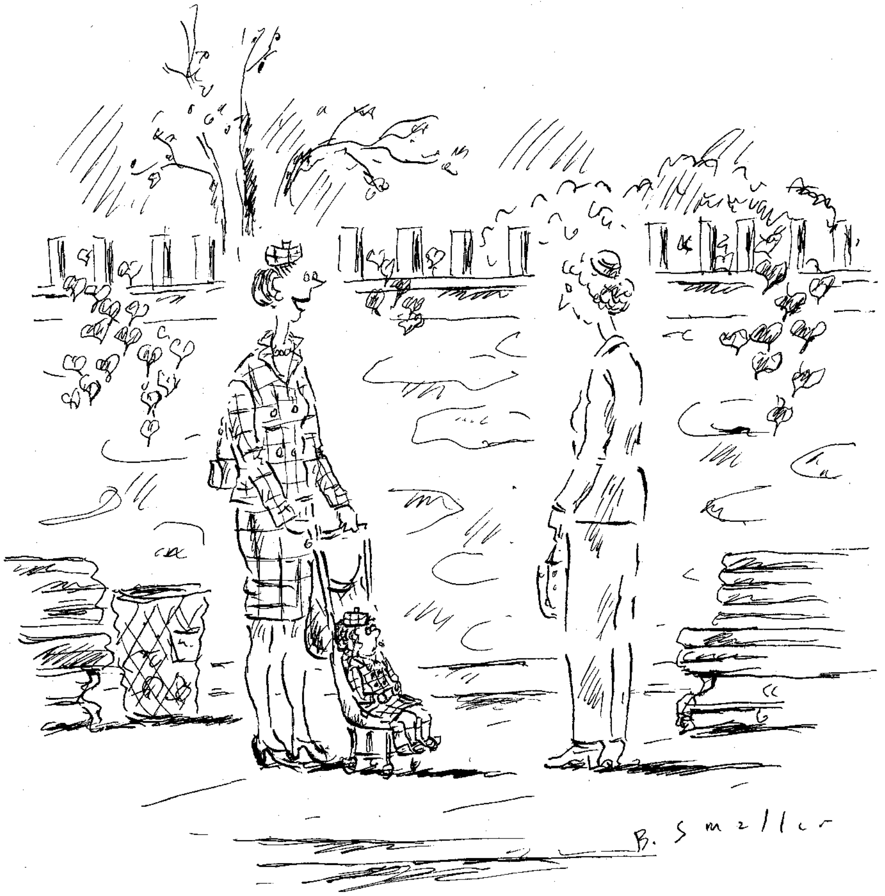
"It's me. It's John."

"Ah."

Stregg took his father-in-law's hand in his. The old man's skin was dry and very soft, nearly translucent. His face was thin, pale, almost saintly, though he'd been ruthless when he was younger, a cutthroat banker, a survivor.

"I'm glad you're here," Stregg's father-in-law said. "How's my little girl?"

"She's just fine." No one had told Carmen's father what had happened. "She has a cold," Stregg lied. "She's



"We have the exact same taste."

staying in bed today. She's probably curled up around her hot-water bottle, sleeping."

"The poor kid."

Stregg resisted telling Carmen's father, as he always used to, "I'll take good care of her." How wrong, and how ironic, would that be? The old man's hand relaxed, and Stregg realized that he had fallen asleep. Still, he continued to sit beside the bed holding his father-in-law's slender and quite elegant hand. It gave him time to consider some things. The baby would be born in four months, and Gleason and Jade were now living in a sturdy ranch-style house not far from Trollwood Park, up in Fargo. Gleason was just about to start college. The last time Stregg visited, Gleason had shaken his hand but said nothing.

As for Jade, she spent a lot of time alone. Stregg couldn't get away much because of Carmen. Jade understood. She was radiant. Her hair was long, a lustrous brown. They went into her bedroom in the middle of the day and made love in the stark light. It was very solemn. He went dizzy with the depth of it. When he lay against her, his perceptions shifted and he saw the secret souls of the objects and plants in the room. Everything had consciousness and meaning. Jade was measureless, but she was ordinary, too. Afterward, Stregg drove back down to New Otto and arrived just in time for dinner.

When he left the old man, Stregg usually patted his arm or made some other vague gesture of apology. This time, still thinking of his visit with Jade, he bent dreamily over Carmen's father. He kissed the dry forehead, stroked back the old man's hair, and thoughtlessly smiled. The old man jerked away suddenly and eyed Stregg like a mad hawk.

"You bastard!" he cried.

One day, Carmen was sitting in her bathrobe at lunch, tapping a knife against the side of a soft-boiled egg. Suddenly she said, "I know who he was. I saw him in a high-school play right here in New Otto."

Stregg's guts turned to ice and he phoned Gleason as soon as he could. Sure enough, Gleason had been in every single drama production in high school. Stregg put the phone down and stared at it. Carmen was at the town library at that very moment, looking through old high-school yearbooks.

This was how it happened that instead of starting college Gleason bolted and joined the Army. Jade was heartbroken and cried day and night after he was shipped off for basic training. She said that she couldn't feel anything anymore, and she turned away from Stregg when he visited and wouldn't let him touch her. After six weeks, Gleason sent a photograph of himself in military gear. He didn't appear to have bulked up much. His helmet seemed to balance on his thin head, shadowing those wide, soft brown eyes. He looked about twelve years old.

Stregg drove home after visiting Jade one afternoon, and put his car keys on the coffee table. "I'm leaving now," he said. "You keep everything. I have clothes. I have shoes. I'll make myself a sandwich and be going now." Jade's cold sorrow had finally driven him to this. Stregg was sure that he would lose her if he didn't take action.

He walked into the kitchen and made the sandwich and put it into a plastic bag. He walked out into the living room and stood in the center of the carpet. Carmen just looked at him. Then she raised her hand, swept it to the side, and let it fall. The gesture seemed to hang in the air, as if her arm had left a trail. Stregg turned and walked out the door and across town, and headed back to Fargo along the highway. There was only a slight wind, and the temperature was about forty-five degrees. The fields were full of standing water and ducks and geese swam in the ditches. He didn't take a ride until the sky darkened.

Shortly after John Stregg moved into the house in Fargo, his baby boy was born. In those dazzling moments after the birth, Stregg had a vision. The baby resembled Gleason, brave young Gleason, with his big feet and no ass to speak of, who looked as if he could hardly lift a water canteen. Gleason's heart was a pale and valiant little fish. Was there anyone more magnificent than Gleason? Stregg saw that Gleason was a kind of Christ figure, a martyr like those in the New Testament. Only he had been thrown to the lions in the name of his sister's happiness. It had occurred to Stregg that, in his new life, Gleason might grow in strength and valor and become exactly the person Carmen believed had abducted her. Now he saw that Gleason already *was* that person, and that Carmen had recognized it all along. He also saw that Gleason had told his sister about the kidnapping.

All of this was clear in the face of the tiny new baby. Stregg looked closer, and tried to see whether Gleason would live or die. But, just then, the baby opened his mouth and bawled. As Jade put the baby to her breast, Stregg sank back into the hospital chair, dizzy with spent adrenaline. For a long time, he just watched mother and son from across the room.

Only twice did Stregg visit New Otto. The first time, he brought a U-Haul and loaded into it all that Carmen had not disposed of—she'd thrown a lot of things away. But physical objects had ceased to matter to Stregg. Jade argued with him every day, threatening to go to the police, to turn him in for the kidnapping.

"You'll lose everything." Stregg waved his arm. "This house. And Gleason will go to jail. Would you like that? You'll be out on the street. And what about little Gleason?"

Jade had named the baby after her brother. There was no getting away from Gleason; he would always control the situation, no matter where he was. Gleason, with his bristle-headed cut, with his combat boots and rifle. In the months after his son's birth, Stregg had come to understand that he would never be forgiven for engineering the kidnapping scheme that had sent Gleason off to the Army. He had lost Jade's love. She kicked him out to sleep in the garage, where he curled up beside his car, in a sleeping bag spread out on a little camp cot. Jade spent all day by herself, caring for the baby and cleaning the house. Every so often, she would thrust a shopping list at Stregg, or make him help with heavy lifting. Beyond that, she didn't want him to get close to her or the baby. He moved around the small house like a ghost, never knowing where to settle.

He'd found a job at the insurance

agency he'd always used, a low-level position assisting others in processing claims. One day, a homeowner's claim from his old address landed on his desk. Carmen had filed a claim on everything that he had taken from the house—his own things, which she had agreed and even pressured him to come and clear out. There were power tools, each with a serial number and an identification code, and some stereo and other electronic equipment, even a small computer. Looking at the list, Stregg felt a glimmer of heat rise in his throat. He took his jacket from the office door, went back to the house that his and Carmen's retirement money had bought, and packed up everything he kept in the garage. He drove to New Otto with a full car, and parked in the driveway of his former home.

After a while, Carmen came to the window. She looked at him as he got out of the car, and he looked at her, through the window, which was like the glass of a dim aquarium. When she vanished, he was not sure whether she would come to the door or be absorbed into the gloom. But she did open the door at last, and beckoned him inside. They stood in the entry, quite close. Her hair had gone from gray to silver-white. A pulse beat in her slender throat. Her arms were stick thin, but she seemed to generate an unusual light. Stregg could feel it, this odd radiance. It seemed to emanate from her translucent skin. It occurred to him that he should sink down at the feet of this beautiful, wronged woman and kiss the hem of the pearl velour jogging suit she was wearing.

"You filed a claim on all my stuff. I'm bringing it back," he said.

"No. I want the money. I need the money," she told him.

"Why?"

"We're sunk. They're not going to buy the bank out. They're opening a new one next to it."

"What about your father's accounts?"

"He'll live to be a hundred," Carmen said. "John, he told me that you were seeing another woman all along."

"I don't know where he got that idea," Stregg said.

Carmen waited.

"All right. Yes."

Her eyes filled with terrible tears and she began to shake. Before Stregg knew it, he was holding her. He shut the door. They made love in the entryway, on the carpet where so many people paused, and then on the bench where visitors sat to remove their boots. His remorse, and his shame, compelled him. And her need for him was so powerful it seemed as if they were going over a rushing waterfall together, falling in a barrel, and at the bottom Stregg cracked open and told her everything.

He had to, because of Gleason. Stregg clung to Carmen with blackness washing over him, and talked and talked.

"I know he violated you," Stregg said, after he'd spilled everything else. "I understand now."

"Who? That boy? He was just a twerp," Carmen said. "He never touched me. I said all that stuff out of desperation, to try to make you jealous. Why, I do not know."

She sat up and eyed him with calm assessment. "Possibly, I thought you still loved me, way deep down. I think I believed there was something in you."

"There is, there is," Stregg said, strangling on a surge of hope, touching her ankles as she got to her feet.

"When the snow was covering me, out in the ditch, I saw your face. Real as real. You bent over me and pulled me out. It wasn't the farmer, it was you."

"It *was* me," Stregg said, lifting his arms. "I must have always loved you."

She looked down at him for a long time, contemplating this amazing fact. Then she went upstairs and called the police.

In the years afterward, Stregg was sometimes asked by the friends he made behind bars what had caused him to confess what he'd done, and then take all the blame. Sometimes he couldn't think of a good reason. Other times, he said he had guessed that it would never end; he'd seen that he'd be kicked from one woman to the other until the end of time. But, after he gave his answer, he always came back to that moment when he'd first opened the door to Gleason, and thought of how, when he saw the boy standing in the glowing porch light, in the snow, with that dull gun and that sad face, he hadn't flinched. ♦

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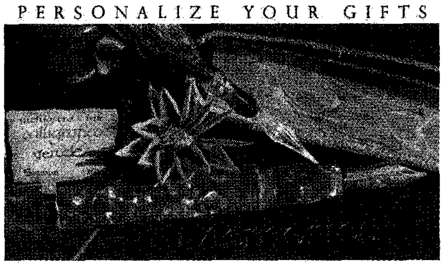

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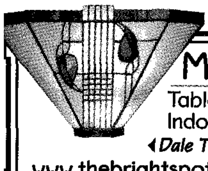

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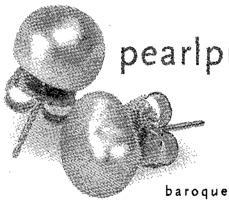

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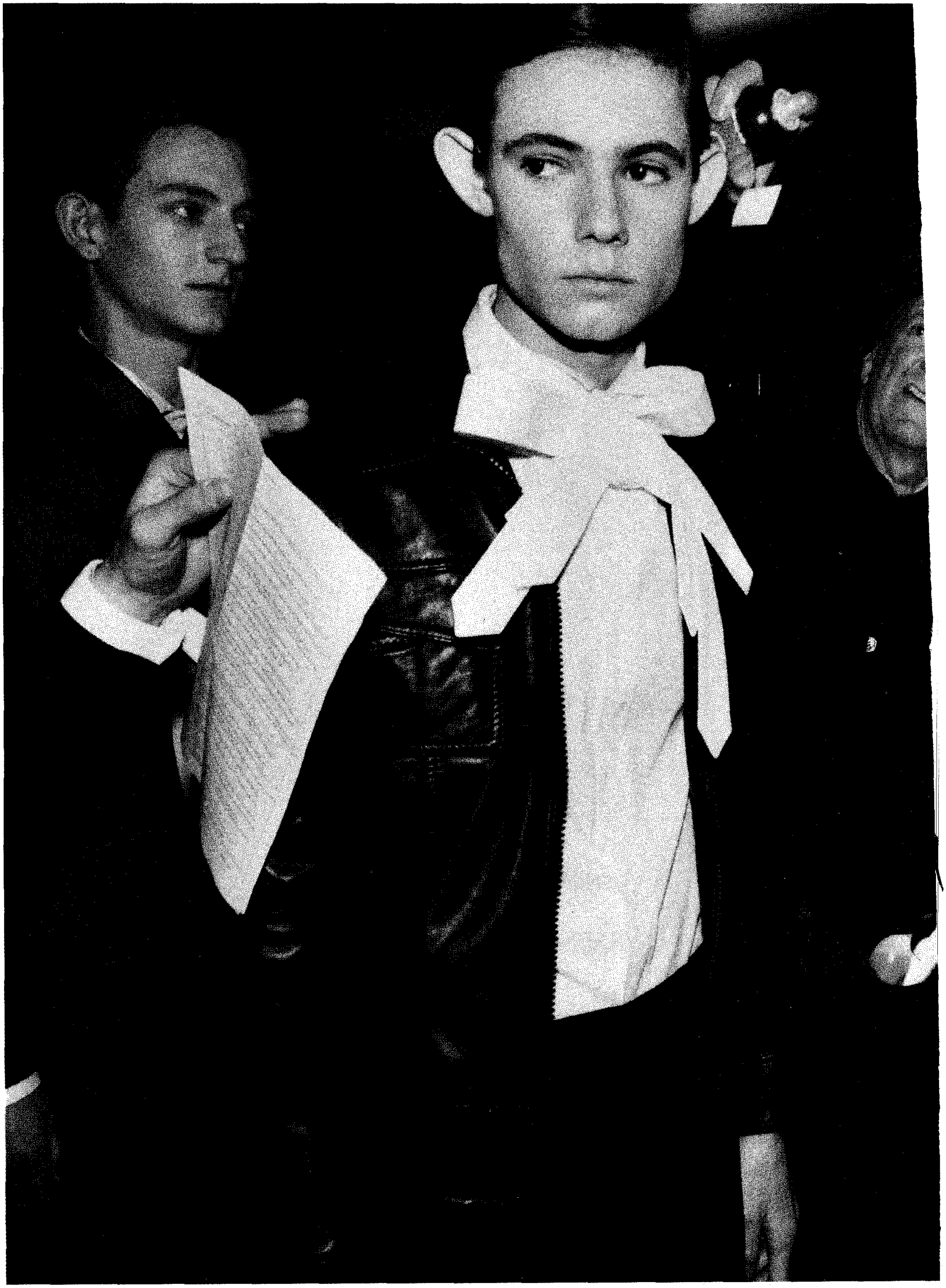
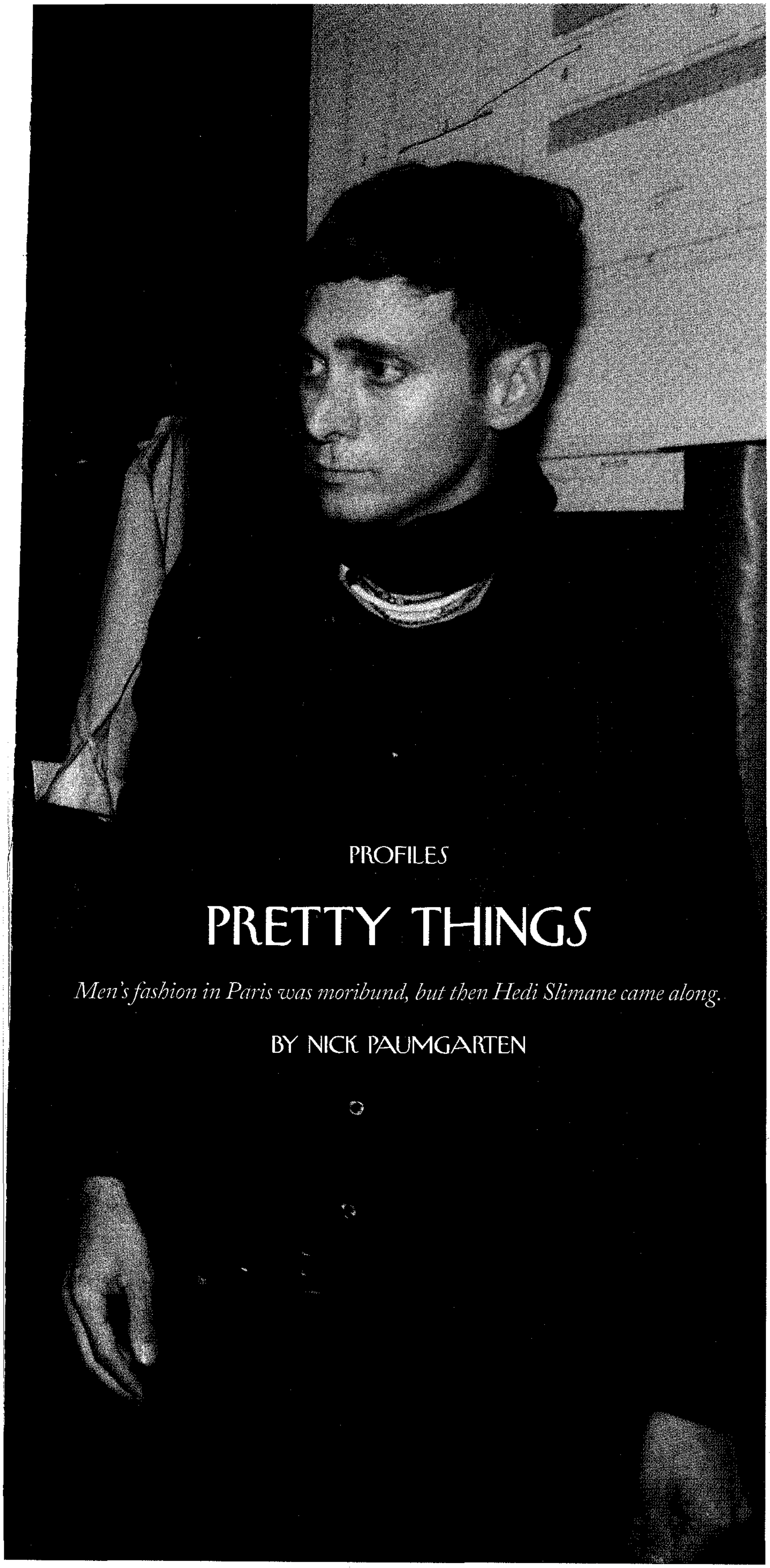


Slimane (right) is renowned for his runway shows; he tends to use unknown or nonprofessional models, whom he searches out on the st



PROFILES

PRETTY THINGS

Men's fashion in Paris was moribund, but then Hedi Slimane came along.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

n clubs. He also casts band members as models. Photograph by William Klein.

Hedi Slimane sits alone in his room, in a pleasant but not very fashionable part of Paris, mooning over an album cover. He has just turned six. The year is 1974. The record, a birthday gift from a friend of his older sister, is "David Live"—David Bowie, recorded at the Tower Theatre in Philadelphia. The friend, Véronique, likes to put on a blue jumpsuit and imitate Bowie. She does a good Mick Jagger, too. Slimane is captivated by her. He is also captivated by the album cover, which features a photograph of Bowie onstage, dressed in a powder-blue double-breasted suit: the jacket is cut short, with narrow but square shoulders, and the pants, although pleated and billowy in the legs, are tight at the crotch. Bowie looks bloodless and emaciated, well on his way to his "Thin White Duke" phase, during which he subsisted, as he later said, on "peppers, cocaine, and milk."

Taste has to come from somewhere. Thirty years later, after Slimane has become a celebrated fashion designer who occasionally claims that he has no precedents or influences—who declares, "I have no nostalgia"—he allows that his sensibility owes a lot to "David Live" and to the early sight of this cool and cadaverous androgyne striking an angular pose. "When you're a kid, you stare at things like this," he says. "There is a moment of isolation in your room—a moment, maybe, of boredom." There are many things that can contribute to a boy's sense that another world exists out there, but, in 1974, nothing quite beat album covers, David Bowie, or older girls in blue jumpsuits.

Slimane designs menswear for Christian Dior, the venerable Paris fashion house. It is often said that he has transformed the male silhouette. Slimane's clothes are generally made for and modelled by whip-thin young men, and among the tastemaking classes—rock stars, magazine editors, sugar daddies—the enthusiasm for his slender cuts has helped the scrawny lad displace the beefy gent as the body type of the age. (Slimane believes in what he once called a "morphology of decades.") The extent to which this transformation has affected either the general public or the bottom line of LVMH, the company that controls Christian Dior and Slimane's division, Dior Homme, is debatable, but such considerations hardly rate with the sophisticates who see him as a standard-bearer for a movement to infuse the old male armor—suits, tuxedos, jeans—with the insouciance and youth of rock and roll. "Some designers are more like stylists," his friend Neil Tennant, of the pop band Pet Shop Boys, told me. " 'Heh-heh, they're doing pirates.' Or 'disco New York.' Hedi is one of those people who create a world."

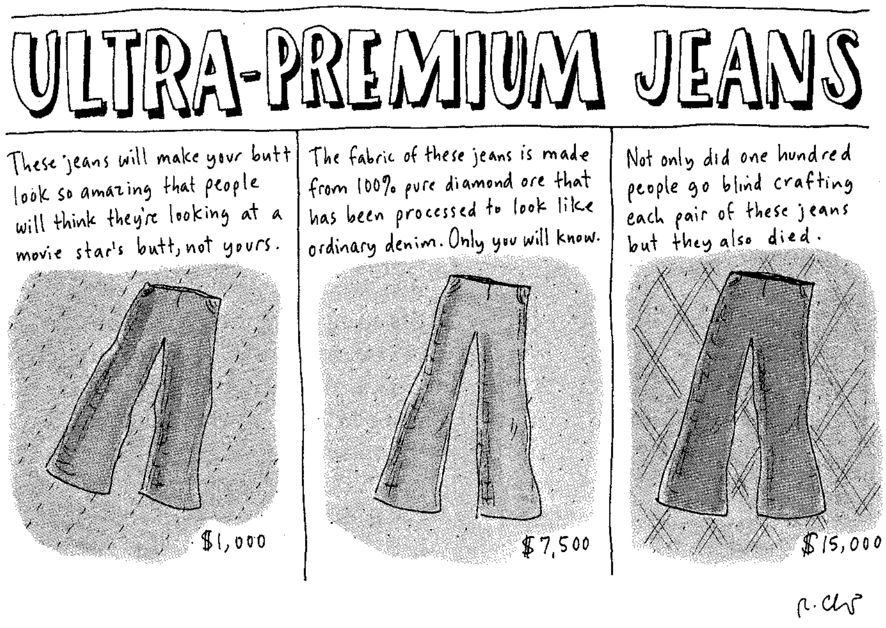
Hedi's world is well edited and diligently curated, with the man himself at the center of it. You might say, although he wouldn't, that he's sort of a cross between Martha Stewart (everything just so) and Andy Warhol (anything's possible). He is reticent and shy, and his pared-down approach to the presentation of himself applies also to the presentation of his work. He will not talk about a show beforehand, or even about what ideas or motifs are occupying his mind at the time, as they may relate to the clothes. He allows almost no one to visit his atelier, on Rue François 1er, in Paris. He doesn't like to talk about a show when it's over, either. He says that he can easily articulate what he is up to—he just prefers not to.

Fashion people talk for him. They describe his clothes as "modern," "cerebral," even "futuristic." What such windy accolades reveal about a jacket is hard to say. Slimane also takes photographs, and designs furniture, and dabbles in architecture and graphic design, and his prevailing aesthetic is sleek and spare, but the clothes themselves are not merely minimal. They turn the sincere but desultory magpie style of a teenage boy into high fashion, by means of the materials, proportions, and craftsmanship of couture. As a result, the clothes are a little challenging, as women's clothes are.

Slimane's menswear lines have drawn on the sartorial style of various movements in rock music, chief among them the recent revival of British guitar rock, which in turn harks back to the punk, glam, and post-punk eras of the seventies and early eighties. In turn, the bands that inspire him end up wearing his clothes: newer acts like Razorlight and Franz Ferdinand, mid-careerists like the White Stripes and Beck, and old-timers like Bowie and Jagger, who have become friends as well as clients.

Another hero of Slimane's youth was Paul Simonon, of the Clash. When the Clash was admitted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in 2003, Slimane had Dior send Simonon a couple of suits; he wore one of them to the induction ceremony. Simonon is an adherent of the idea that, as he put it, "you can't have a situation where the audience dresses better than the group." Soon afterward, Slimane went to Simonon's studio, to photograph his bass guitar. They got on well. "I like narrow trousers," Simonon explained. "I don't like flares."

Slimane, who met Bowie while out to dinner with (as he put it in an e-mail) "Boy Georges," once asked him about "David Live." Slimane told me, "I go the impression from him he didn't lik that album."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Among the advances that have been attributed to Hedi Slimane is the hair style known as the "faux-hawk"—a coxcombical variation on the Mohawk, in which the hair is swept up toward the top from the sides. He says that he wound up with this haircut by accident, which is hard to believe, considering how particular he is. Hair stylists began to press it on their customers. It was eventually adopted by such widely photographed men as the soccer star David Beckham and the pop singer Robbie Williams, and by young urbanites, gay men, and celebrity toddlers around the world. Slimane abandoned his own faux-hawk when he encountered one on a desk clerk at a hotel in Prague.

Slimane's most recent haircut has not been widely imitated. It consists of a wad brushed thickly forward over the top of his forehead and cropped straight across. It looks, frankly, a little like a toupee. Slimane's friend Janet Street-Porter, the British writer and broadcaster, said, "He looks like a demented monk."

It matters what Slimane looks like, because he is, in a way, his own best model. Being Hedi, he is the apotheosis of Hedi-ness. He has fine features and large, sad-seeming eyes and a melancholic expression that calls to mind Edward Scissorhands. He often furrows his brow. He is very slight, and he wears his clothes the way he would have others wear them: jeans low on the hips, jacket tight in the shoulders and short in the arms, silk scarf, Converse Chucks. Because he's so thin and others would like to be, his eating habits are a source of curiosity. He says that he eats baby food, and some stories have suggested that he hardly eats at all. But the fashion designer who can do without food is a mythical beast, like the business executive who never sleeps. (Slimane's friend and mentor Karl Lagerfeld supposedly survives on Pepsi Max, and has said that the reason he lost eighty pounds, not long ago, was to fit into clothes designed by Slimane.) "Hedi eats loads," Street-Porter told me. Tennant recalled, "One time at his hotel in London, Hedi had chicken goujons as a starter. Then, for his main course, he had a larger portion of chicken goujons. I told him I thought this was strange, and he said, 'But they're very good.' " Slimane doesn't drink, smoke, or do drugs. He merely fetishizes the appearance of those who do.

"When I was a teen-ager, people used to comment on how dreadfully skinny I was," Slimane told me. "I used to take pills to put on weight." Since no clothes fit him, he began designing his own. His mother was a seamstress, so he knew his way around a sewing machine. "I also always thought clothes looked better on a lean figure," he said. "Life was not that unfair after all. There was a future for skinny people."

Slimane was born in Paris and grew up in the Buttes-Chaumont district. His father, who is Tunisian and a retired accountant, had been a boxer in Bordeaux (*poids léger*, of course), and he met Hedi's mother, an Italian, when she was working as a coat-check girl in a club in Saint Germain des Près. ("He won her over with a great dance," Slimane told me.) He hardly keeps in touch with them. In his early teens, he spent vacations with an uncle who lived in Geneva and hung out with a "free-spirited" cousin and her brother, "who was quite the opposite," Slimane said. "Something like the Patrick Bateman character in 'American Psycho.' I was stuck between indie kids and call girls, squats and palace hotels."

After high school, Slimane studied art for three years and then began helping friends on fashion shoots and shows, as a freelance art director and casting scout. In the early nineties, he spent a couple of penniless but fond years in New York, going to night clubs with Stephen Gan, who is now the creative director of *Harper's Bazaar* and the editor of *Visionaire,* and passing through phases, including a haut-preppy stage, in which, as Gan recalls, he insisted on the "perfect polo shirt, the perfect khakis." One day, doing fittings for a friend's fashion show, Slimane was noticed by the LVMH consultant and talent-trawler Jean-Jacques Picart, who on a hunch hired him as his assistant. Three years later, Pierre Bergé, the C.E.O. of Yves Saint Laurent, and Saint Laurent's longtime companion, noticed Slimane, too—actually, he'd merely heard about him—and tapped him to be the menswear designer at Yves Saint Laurent, even though he had very little experience or training. "All of a sudden, Hedi was designing," Gan said. "It was a fluke."

Saint Laurent's menswear line was moribund at the time. "Milan was menswear, and French houses were not interested in men's fashion," Slimane said. "To hire me was an insignificant decision, if you think in concrete terms. But, from a different perspective, I really had as a kid a natural attraction to the house of Saint Laurent, and when Pierre Bergé took the chance I thought I was extremely blessed. I remember sitting down in his stunning office on the Avenue Marceau, totally petrified. It didn't last more than ten minutes. I just went straight to the atelier a couple of days later, walking on tiptoes, and designed my first collection."

It took him a few seasons to start doing things the way he wanted to. By 1998, he was attracting acclaim. Then, in 1999, Gucci took over Y.S.L., which meant that Slimane would have a new boss: Tom Ford, the creative director at Gucci, who insisted that Slimane report to him. "It was a totally new idea to me, this story of 'reporting,' " Slimane told me. (His English is good but not perfect.) "I might have never heard the word 'reporting' before. Reporting to Tom was not going to happen." Bergé objected to the arrangement, too. "I was absolutely against it," he told me. "Tom Ford is not my cup of tea. I don't respect him, not at all. He is not a designer. He is a marketing man." After meeting with Ford at the Ritz ("The situation became unpleasant," Slimane said), Slimane resigned.

When Slimane went to Dior, the women's line (guided, since 1996, by John Galliano) was its strength; the men's line consisted basically of ties and socks sold in airport duty-free shops. It was, Slimane has said, "a blank slate." He redesigned the atelier, hired a new team, and sought to apply some of the couture division's verve and craftsmanship. He also installed two hundred speakers in the atelier's ceiling, turning it into a canopy of sound.

In 2001, he presented his first Dior collection, in Paris, a day after Ford showed his first for Y.S.L. When Saint Laurent himself, who had skipped Ford's show, not only attended Slimane's but led a standing ovation, fashion people, eager Kremlinologists all, deemed it a volcanic incident, right up there with Khrushchev and the shoe.

Hedi Slimane can't drive. He'd like to learn how, but he can't find the time. While in Paris, he keeps a car and driver on call around the clock, in case he decides to go out searching for models in the early-morning hours. The car is a Jaguar. The driver wears Dior. "It would be a bit strange for him to show up in a funny suit," Slimane said.

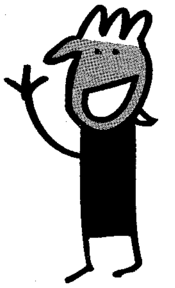
Slimane is distinguished from most other designers by his practice of casting unknowns or nonprofessionals for his shows. Like everyone else in the trade, he calls them "boys." He spots them on the street or in clubs—a process that Slimane calls "boy safari." He won't really say what the right attributes are, and they can vary from show to show, but generally he prefers his boys tall, lean, slightly androgynous, and English. Usually, he has an assistant make the approach, but if he is alone he will do it himself. He then summons all the candidates to a photography studio and whittles them down to three or four dozen, whom he invites to Paris for fittings. Casting is a year-round job.

One day last September, Slimane was riding around Covent Garden, in London, when a lanky boy caught his eye. The boy was twirling around a lamppost, as people sometimes do in the movies. Slimane had the driver stop the car. He got out and asked the boy if he'd ever modelled and, when the answer was no, whether he'd be interested in trying. The boy's name was Chris Ulyatt. He was eighteen years old, and it was his first day ever in London. He was from Stratford-Upon-Avon. "I just recognized a type of character," Slimane told me later. "He was very precisely it." Ulyatt was wary at first, fearing that this was just "some London bloke," but he took Slimane's card. The next day, while Slimane was riding through another neighborhood, he saw Ulyatt again, walking in the street—a coincidence that struck even Slimane, who is not an especially spiritual man, as providential. Ulyatt took the job.

Slimane is renowned for his runway shows. He takes every aspect of them—lighting, casting, set design—very seriously, but perhaps nothing, after the clothes themselves, is as important to him as the music. In years past, he has used either established artists, such as Beck, or little-known bands, such as Razorlight and the Rakes. He will also sometimes cast band members as models, or seat them in the front row, so that the aging pashas of Paris couture (and aging rock stars) get to witness the youth-infusing pallor of honest, grotty rockers whose greatest thrill at these things may be the free champagne.

And so when Ulyatt travelled to Paris for his fittings he found himself talking to Slimane about music for the show, specifically about how appropriate the Smiths' song "This Charming Man" would be for the clothes. Slimane thought it overused. Ulyatt recommended a Smiths-inspired band called Superheroes, whose members, he declined to mention, were his closest friends in Stratford, and whose biggest gig so far had been in the local lumberyard. Slimane seemed interested. They sent him a tape, and he liked it. They had no recording contract. In fact, they didn't even have a name, because Superheroes was already taken by a band in Denmark. As they set about coming up with a new one, Slimane sent the band an e-mail outlining what he was after, musically. "He repeated the words 'melancholy' and 'nonchalant' about a hundred times," the lead singer, Sam, told me.

One afternoon in January, a few weeks before the show, the band went to London to meet Slimane, at his hotel. They had been in the studio recording a song for the show; Dior had paid for studio time, in return for their work. Slimane had reserved the library on the hotel's second floor. He sat in the corner, next to a gas fire, his slender form swallowed up by a giant wingback chair, which made him look a bit like a punked-up Alistair Cooke.



The band arrived: four shaggy but polite young men—Sam, Adam, Jack, and Jack—who, like Slimane, all wore Converse Chucks, and jeans low on their hips. In the John Bonham tradition, the drummer, a Jack, was the only one who clearly outweighed Slimane, and he said nothing except "It's the new cool thing to have a new band." ("Yeah, so now we're an old band," the bassist, Adam, said.) Three of them sat on a couch facing Slimane, and Sam sat on a chair next to them. Slimane said that he liked the first six minutes of their song, a catchy number entitled "These Grey Days" (melancholy: "I've been short of logic, so / I'm passed out on the patio"; and nonchalant: "I'll send a nasty text / To show I'm not impressed"), but that they needed to develop it a bit more and write more lyrics, so it could last around sixteen minutes.

"It needs to fit with all the elements, the whole atmosphere we have in mind," Slimane said. "For me, when it's not quite right, it's hard to explain it, but I know it's not. I really love these first six minutes."

"Yeah, yeah," Sam said.

"Your voice is amazing—I love it," Slimane said. "I don't want you to get too intimidated by the project."

The guitar player, Jack, mentioned some bands that Slimane had used in the past.

Slimane said, "You shouldn't listen to those bands"—not, at any rate, for guidance. "It should be organic, natural. I think you'll find your sound and logic. It just can't be *forcé*." By now, Slimane had moved to the floor and was sitting at their feet.

The band still needed a name in time for the show. Slimane told them the story of his discovery of the Rakes. He had seen the drummer in the street and cast him in a show. The drummer gave him a flyer with an illustration of a rake. "I said, 'What is this, gardening?' "

After they'd gone, Slimane returned to the wingback and ate a potato chip. He was expecting some prospective models. Agencies, hearing that he was seeing a few, would send over more. There was a knock on the door, and two stringy young men in the obligatory low-slung jeans walked in. Slimane studied them from the wingback, with a kind of nervous, avid smile, as they put down their backpacks and stood against a wall. A moment or two passed. Slimane said, "Thank you very much," and they gathered their belongings and left.

"You sort of know if it's working or not," Slimane said. "For those two, I'm afraid the answer is no. It's contrived. I don't like it contrived."

Three more appeared. One of them, a severe-looking dark-haired young Dan named Mons, seemed to attract Slimane's keen attention, a widening o the eyes. Mons was six feet two and half inches tall, with a thirty-and-a-half-inch waist.

"Would you mind just dropping your bag?" Slimane said. "I'm going to ask you to walk." Slimane watched Mons go, and an assistant took pictures.

"I like that boy a lot," Slimane said, after they'd left. "The allure—something within his way of moving. He will translate well for my clothes."

Hedi Slimane sends out illegible notes—white cards with his name printed in the center, in Helvetica type, and horizontal lines scribbled above and below. He assures friends that these lines are actually words and sentences and that the sentiments they express are warm ones. Slimane is painstakingly courteous, improbably so in a business not known for civility. He asks questions and hangs on the answers. He is an exacting but quiet boss. You will never see him pass through a doorway first.

Slimane has become a core member of that global fellowship of artists, designers, filmmakers, and pop musicians who seem always to run into one another at hotels and parties, at film festivals and art fairs, and who speak constantly of working together on projects. His friends tend to be engaged in what Klaus Biesenbach, the P.S. 1 chief curator (and Friend of Hedi), called contemporary visual culture—a lenient category. (Slimane does not call himself an artist.) He sometimes photographs his visual-culture friends for magazines, or they photograph him, and they take him on as a sort of idol and charm. Slimane, for example, has photographed his friend the filmmaker Gus Van Sant for *Vogue*—they met at Cannes a few years ago and seem to share an interest, aesthetically speaking, in postpubescent male degenerates and mopes—and Van Sant has filmed Slimane, although to no particular end. ("Rather than having no cameras, I had some cameras," Van Sant explained.) When I suggested to Neil Tennant that Hedi seems to collect people, he said, "People collect Hedi."

Tennant, his fellow Pet Shop Boy Chris Lowe, and Janet Street-Porter first met Slimane in 2002, in Venice, at

A HAGGING MATCH

Axe-thumps outside
like wave-hits through
a night ferry:
            you
whom I cleave to, hew to,
splitting firewood.

—*Seamus Heaney*

the fortieth-birthday party for David Furnish, Elton John's companion. "Chris and I noticed him around," Tennant said. "He had all these Hedi clothes on. We were intrigued by him." Later, on the way back to the hotel, they found themselves on the same boat. Together, they went up to Street-Porter's room and had hot chocolate and ham sandwiches. They stayed up late, discussing music and air travel, and soon Slimane was spending more time in London with his new friends.

"London's a pretty hard place to crack," Street-Porter said. "People are very choosy. And yet he has penetrated all that. His English has got better, and he's brilliant at text messages."

Slimane also collects places. Paris bores him; it lacks a youth culture, or a sense of energetic disenchantment. He lives there because it is his home, and couture's. (He has an apartment on the Quai Voltaire, overlooking the Seine and the Louvre.) And so for stimulus he chooses other cities. Like David Bowie's humanoid alien in "The Man Who Fell to Earth," who came here to procure water for his own planet, Slimane spends a lot of his time in this or that town, quietly observing its citizens and ways, in order to extract its visual resources. In recent years, it's been London. He distills some kind of Londonness, filters it through a Paris atelier, and offers it back, in suspenders and fancy boots.

Last year, Slimane put out a book called "London: Birth of a Cult." It contained photographs of Pete Doherty, the drug-addled front man of the Libertines and Babyshambles. Slimane has spent years taking pictures in rock clubs, and he followed Doherty around for more than a year, chronicling him in all his sallow, big-pupilled glory. "At first we thought, Here's some weird French bloke taking photographs," Alan McGee, who managed the Libertines, said. "But Hedi's very nice and very sweet. He's not a leech, not a user." Doherty is the perfect incarnation of Byronic rock-and-roll dissolution and of what the British papers have called skank chic, and he and the Libertines helped usher in a fervid rock revival. For a time, Slimane's shows and designs were very much influenced by this scene. As McGee put it, "Every fucking model looked like a Libertine, know what I mean?"

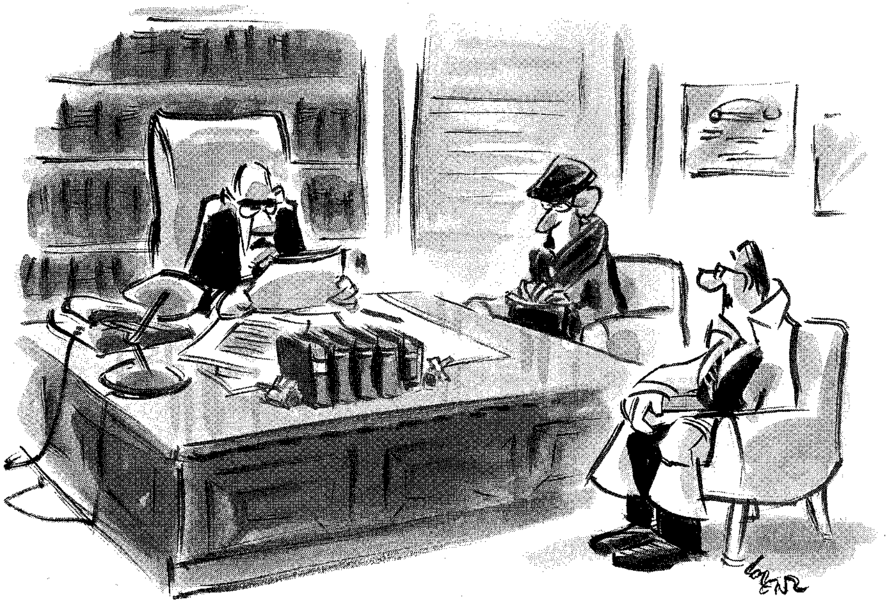
The band broke up in 2004, a year after Doherty served time in jail for burgling the apartment of his bandmate Carl Barat, and Doherty soon descended into tabloid notoriety, for his relationships with cocaine, heroin, and Kate Moss. Slimane's fascination with him predates this descent, and he aims to outflank it as well. "It's all a total bore," Slimane told me. "I was doing this project for over a year before any of this started happening. This phenomenon of the Libertines, it belonged to a small microcosm of people. The thing made sense in time. The attention came for the wrong reasons. It displaced an honest thing with a different context."

This winter, he put together a sort of photographic elegy for this recontextualized thing, at the Galerie Almine Rech, in Paris. The invitation to the opening measured five feet by three feet—fifteen square feet of heavy paper stock. Printed on both sides, blown up to elephant scale, was Slimane's photograph of a fan's sweaty neck, ear, and hair, with moles. The show was called "As Tears Go By," after the first song that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards wrote together, and its theme was fan devotion. There were giant prints of crowd-surfing, stage-invading fans, next to black Lucite panels that bore the names of songs sung by Doherty: "For Lovers," "Time for Heroes." On the floor, two microphones, one belonging to Doherty and the other to Barat, were connected by a single cord—a fantasy gesture. Slimane chose not to attend the opening.

Before London, there was Berlin. When he left Y.S.L., in 2000, he was invited by Biesenbach to do a two-year residency at the Kunst-Werke Institute there. Biesenbach remembers Slimane arriving with his own light bulbs: "He didn't want exactly white light." Over the next two years, he took pictures of Berlin citizens and street kids. The ensuing exhibition, and book, his first, was called "Berlin." In Germany, he also got to know a new crop of eclectic personages with project potential. "We had these dinner parties," Biesenbach said. "Everyone would come—Malcolm McLaren, Fischerspooner, Susan Sontag."

Biesenbach also introduced Slimane to Doug Aitken, an artist from Los Angeles. One day, he called them on two separate phone lines and then held the two receivers up against each other, so that they could talk. Since then, there have been projects: for example, Aitken created an architectural installation for the Dior Homme store in Tokyo, which was designed by Slimane (he has designed about a dozen Dior Homme stores around the world, including the one in New York). The two are supposed to do an art book this spring.

Los Angeles may also have become Slimane's latest urban crush. The problem is that, unlike London or Berlin, it cannot be reached by train, and Slimane is terrified of flying. When he is in Los Angeles, he likes to hang around Aitken's studio, in Venice Beach, or join Aitken for drives up and down the coast. One day, Slimane said that he would like to learn how to surf, so Aitken took him to a secluded break north of Malibu. "The surf is pretty big, and good," Aitken recalled. "Hedi's lagging behind. I notice he's standing there admiring his wetsuit. He's saying, 'This is the ultimate suit. This is *the wetsuit suit*.' It was like watching this strange creature trying on a new skin. I think the cut of the wetsuit suit may have snuck into his designs a bit." Aitken gave him some pointers and began paddling out with



“Your wife gets the house, the car, the dog, your I.R.A., and ten thousand dollars a month. In return, she acknowledges your right to exist.”

• •

some friends. “After two minutes, we looked back and saw two legs sticking out of the foam. He likes to think he almost died that day—‘Doooug, I almost drowned!’ ”

One evening, while riding in his car, Slimane and I got to talking about how amplified rock music can lead to hearing problems, and this brought us, inevitably, to the subject of whitewater kayaking. “Kayaking,” Slimane said, furrowing his brow as if neither the word nor the deed had ever occurred to him. “I would like to try kayaking.”

A Boston punk band named Keys to the Streets of Fear released a song last year called “Hedi Slimane”:

> I want pants like Hedi Slimane
> I wanna dance like Hedi Slimane
> Live in France like Hedi Slimane
> I wanna fuck like Hedi Slimane.

Slimane has listened to it but says, “I could not hear or understand the lyrics at all.”

Three years ago, Slimane considered leaving Dior. “I felt a bit dry,” he told me. Instead, he negotiated a non-exclusive contract, which enabled him to pursue other things, as a diversion from menswear’s semiannual cycle (fall collection, spring collection, ad infinitum). He can indulge his other aspirations and interests. Projects. Slimane is an embodiment of the contemporary notion that if you are good at one thing you can be considered good at others. All related printed materials share a typeface, and that is Helvetica.

Not long ago, the Architecture Foundation, in London, invited him to collaborate on a project—an installation outside its gallery, on Old Street. The gallery’s curator had seen a Slimane installation at P.S. 1 and had thought that he might bring a fresh perspective to the task of building a building just for the sake of it. Slimane made sketches of a structure he had in mind, and a team of architects and engineers, from the firm Building Design Partnership (BDP), which typically designs large-scale projects such as hospitals and office buildings, set to work, pro bono, turning them into an edifice that would abide by the laws of physics.

With projects come meetings. One morning in January, the team received Slimane in a conference room on the ground floor of BDP’s headquarters, in London’s East End. The view through the window was of an old brick brewers’ yard traversed by young Londoners in stovepipe trousers. Slimane came from Paris by train. He wore low-slung Dior jeans, high-heeled boots, a black leather jacket, a hooded sweatshirt, a silk scarf, and a serious expression. Slimane’s idea was to render a stage vertically. He envisioned a black steel structure, four stories tall, each floor a platform with room for one member of a rock band, his instrument, and not much else—the drummer on the top floor, the bassist on three, and so forth. It would be fronted with glass, preferably seamless, so that you could see inside, and a giant speaker would hang off it, to amplify a performance for passersby.

The architects had made four cardboard maquettes, each about the size of a shoebox, and arrayed them at one end of a conference table. The maquettes brought to mind the tiny Stonehenge stage set from “This Is Spinal Tap,” mistakenly built to the proportions of a sketch on a napkin. Slimane and the architects clustered around them. The atmosphere was solemn. Quickly it became clear that this was a complicated undertaking, that it would require hundreds of hours of work by dozens of people. The structure would stand for just twelve weeks.

The architects ran through questions and complications not addressed in Slimane’s original sketches: for example, how to keep the structure from falling down, and how to get people from one floor to the next. Regarding the circulation problem, one of the architects ran through the options: a standard stairway, a spiral stairway (“No,” Slimane said at once), or ladders.

“I don’t like the ladders,” Slimane said. “They create a tension within the space. I’d rather have the stages kept free.”

The architects made a push for ladders, while Slimane, hands plunged into the pockets of his leather jacket, considered the maquettes. “It’s a lot of constraints,” he said. “Is this the right word? ‘Constraints’? ”

Someone presented another constraint. As currently imagined, the structure would be too heavy and would crush its foundation. One solution was to make it shorter.

“I’m always working with elongation,” Slimane said. “It’s a principle that’s very important to me.” After further discussion, he declared, “The height is something I would not like to change. If the staircase is an issue, with the weight, we can do the ladders.”

One of the architects reached for the maquette with the spiral staircase.

Another said, "If Hedi's not happy with a spiral staircase, let's let it go."

That maquette was pushed away, like a plate of cold eggs. Still, the constraints kept coming.

"There are issues having to do with weather."

"At the moment, we'd advise that it's better to enclose it."

"You'd need some kind of guardrail or cage."

"We don't want to kill anyone."

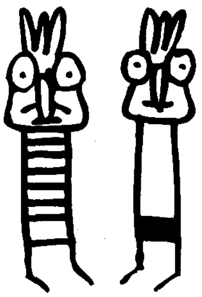
The next day, they met again, to look at a new round of maquettes that the architects had stayed up into the night preparing. "This is a first for us," one of them told me. "One of the great pleasures in this business is building for longevity. It's fascinating, to be giving the same consideration to something temporary." I asked him how much the project would cost. He paused and said, "It's costing a lot more than we thought it was going to."

Another architect was talking about what material to use in order to enclose each platform. Half-seriously, he suggested chicken wire.

"What is chicken wire?" Slimane said. Something about hearing him say this, in his French accent, made everyone laugh, gently.

The first person down the runway at Slimane's show this winter, in an abandoned tennis center in Paris, was Chris Ulyatt, the Stratford boy. Male models, unlike their female counterparts, aren't asked to walk like Lipizzaners; Ulyatt strode up and back like a normal human being, although he was uncommonly long and lean, as bony as a giraffe. His hair was dyed red, pomaded, and slicked flatly back, what you might see on a woman impersonating a man in a musical about Oxford. (Or, for that matter, Bowie impersonating the man who fell to earth.) He was dressed in a tuxedo with a jacket that was cut extremely short and a loopy black bow tie and was accompanied by the recorded voice of his Stratford mate Sam singing the opening lines of "These Grey Days." A fire flickered at the head of the runway. Certain lyrics—"I know I'm strange / I know I've changed / I'm being brave / For no one's sake"—seemed apposite, in the way that a song by the Cure might to a gloomy teen.

The cavalcade of models was purposeful and persistent. They all had the same slicked-back hair and some variation on the refugee-in-his-awkward-stage build. Many of them had improbably large ears, including one whose ears looked like prosthetics. The clothes were strange and beautiful. There were keyhole coats, satin trenches, billowy trousers, cummerbunds that looked like corsets: even to the untrained eye, everything seemed flawlessly made. To that same untrained eye, however, a great deal of it seemed more appropriate for a woman than for a man. (Women—Madonna, Jeanne Moreau, Siouxsie Sioux—love wearing Slimane's clothes. Slimane has said that he would like to design for women, although he also likes to say that he already does, at Dior Homme.) In general, the clothes in this collection, which will reach stores in August, were more formal and elegant than Slimane's previous collections: less street, more studio. A return, if you will, to Paris. Regardless of whether you might wear these things, the discipline of the presentation, its coherence and conviction, was winning, as was the spectacle: extreme pretentiousness leavened by tact. A model came out in a giant cape, and "These Grey Days" gave way to a long spell of darkness and quiet, after which, up on a dimly lit balcony, a string trio appeared on a conveyor belt, the players positioned fifteen metres apart. The strings reprised the melody, although in an arrangement that owed more to Mozart than to Morrissey, and the entire cast reëmerged for an evening-wear encore, a procession of lovely, ludicrous tuxedos. As Slimane finally leaned out for a bow, the audience delivered a standing ovation.



The band had settled on the name Eight Legs. Its four members sat in the front row, opposite the usual panel of distinguished Parisians (Lagerfeld, Bergé, Charlotte Rampling, Catherine Deneuve) and rockers (Razorlight, Michael Stipe—"an interesting bloke," according to one of the Jacks). People came over to meet them. "There were so many beautiful, chic ladies there," this Jack reported afterward. One observer, seated a few rows behind the band members, said later, "They seemed in imminent danger of getting laid."

The fashion press was more interested in the collection. It was, as usual, almost unanimously enthusiastic. A rumor had been going around Paris that Slimane, whose contract with Dior expires in July, was considering returning to Yves Saint Laurent, to take over not only its menswear line but its women's line as well. And so the latest collection's "erotic formality," as Cathy Horyn put it in the *Times*, was interpreted by some as a kind of audition for Y.S.L. and its bosses at the Gucci group. The reasoning was that since Tom Ford had left Gucci (he did so in 2004), and John Galliano stood in Slimane's way at Dior, Y.S.L. was the natural place for Slimane to design a women's line. When I asked him about some of this later, in an e-mail, he sent back a photograph of Ulyatt, hair slicked back, and an MP3 of a demo by an obscure new band called the Holloways, the chorus of which was "Why should I reinvent myself / When the world that I see / Will not change, for you and me?" He wouldn't talk about whether he will be staying at Dior.

As for Eight Legs, after the show the band followed Ulyatt and the other models out for a few drinks, and then they all got lost in the Métro—two dozen lanky lads with slicked-back hair clustering around a subway map—on their way to the after-party, in the basement of the Highlander, a Scottish pub. Slimane soon joined them at the pub and began quietly taking pictures. He and Jack the guitar player hugged, and Slimane said, regarding the string trio's version of "These Grey Days," "That was my present to you, boys." A videotape of the show played on a giant screen, and all the models sang along with the lyrics. The band and the models had to pay their own way at the bar, and they drank themselves broke. One model passed out under a table; another danced naked in the middle of the pub.

Since then, Eight Legs's prospects have improved. They've been approached by potential managers. They played a London gig not long after the Dior show, and Slimane was there, with his camera. "We were nobodies," Sam told me. "But now that Hedi Slimane's given us the thumbs-up it seems there are a lot of people who want a slice of the pie." ♦

ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE RAID

How Carl Icahn came up short.

BY KEN AULETTA

Richard D. Parsons, who runs Time Warner, the world's largest media company, does not fit the C.E.O. stereotype. He has a scruffy beard. He is black. He hugs strangers, and believes that he can make just about anyone like him. So it was natural that when, in August, Parsons learned that Carl Icahn's hedge fund, Icahn Partners, had joined three others to acquire three-per-cent ownership of Time Warner, he called Icahn and asked if he could drop by. "It never hurts to show a guy some respect," Parsons said later. He knew that Icahn had made billions as a corporate raider in the eighties and had pioneered the art of "greenmail." (The raiders would buy a block of shares in a company and sell them back at a premium, in return for agreeing to drop a challenge to the company's management.) But Parsons, who once worked for Nelson A. Rockefeller, and who was the chairman of Rudolph Giuliani's 1993 mayoral campaign, also knew that this was as much a political campaign as a business battle.

On August 17th, Parsons walked from Time Warner's headquarters, at Columbus Circle, to Icahn's office, which is on the forty-seventh floor of the General Motors Building, three blocks away, on Fifth Avenue. They met for forty minutes, and both later described the meeting as "philosophical." Their only point of agreement was that Time Warner's stock, at about eighteen dollars per share, was undervalued. But Parsons believed that Time Warner's stock, like that of other "old media" companies, was depressed because the market was uncertain about their growth prospects in the digital age. Icahn believed that it was because Parsons is too "passive" as an executive.

Icahn made two proposals. He wanted to spin off Time Warner Cable into a separate company and sell shares to the public—to "unlock" shareholder value. (Earlier, Parsons had announced plans to sell sixteen per cent of the company's cable operations to the public, and to buy back five billion dollars' worth of shares.) Icahn wanted the company to buy back twenty billion dollars in shares, and said that the mechanism for the sale should be a "Dutch auction"—where the company invites shareholders to propose a selling price above the current stock price and then chooses the lowest bidders. This appeals to hedge funds, which tend to be short term and take at least a twenty-per-cent commission on clients' profits; Icahn, who said that his fund had paid an average price of seventeen dollars and twenty cents per share—and controlled at least thirteen million shares—stood to gain perhaps three dollars on each share he sold, plus his own fee, of twenty-five per cent.

Parsons saw this as greenmail, although he said of the meeting, "We parted amicably." Icahn was less diplomatic. "You say, 'Jesus, he's a nice guy,'" Icahn said. "But is he smart enough that he's not telling me anything, or does he not know anything?" He was certain of one thing about Parsons: "He doesn't want to give up his throne." Before the two men shook hands, Icahn issued an icy warning: "I can't be responsible if this gets ugly."

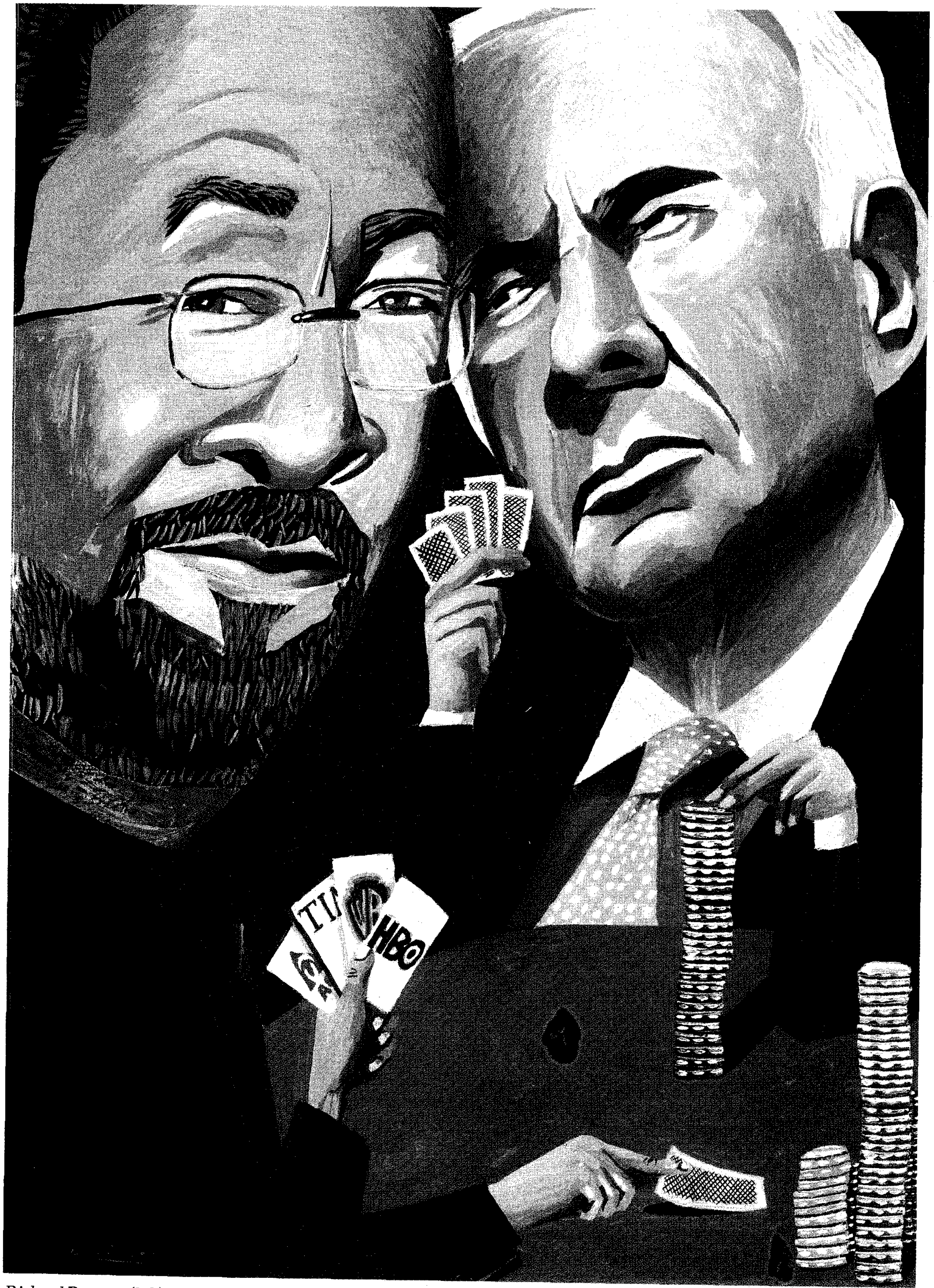
It did get ugly. Icahn eventually charged Parsons and Time Warner with mismanagement, called for the breakup of the company, and mounted a proxy battle, asking shareholders to remove Parsons and other members of the board. "I enjoy the war," Icahn told me in late January. "It's the greatest game in the world. It's like a poker game. Take Time Warner. I am on a battlefield against their best top lawyers, thirty P.R. guys are against me, and I'm here. I love being the underdog. Deep down—I know it sounds immodest, but I'm much better than them at this type of thing."

Although in the end Icahn failed in his bid, the market forces he represents—corporate raiders, or, in Icahn's preferred term, "shareholder activists"—have staged a comeback, led by Icahn, Nelson Peltz, Kirk Kerkorian, and some of the investors who were once aligned with the defunct investment bank Drexel Burnham Lambert and its convicted junk-bond specialist, Michael Milken. Their financing often comes not from junk bonds, the weapon of the eighties, but from an enormous pool of capital—more than a trillion dollars—controlled by hedge funds and equity funds that tend to look for quick returns. These investors usually seek growth stocks, or companies whose costs they can radically cut—not visible media companies, like Time Warner, News Corp., Viacom, and Disney, whose stock has stalled or dropped in recent years.

Time Warner, which Parsons has led since May, 2002, has suffered more than most. In January, 2001, when the merger of Time Warner and AOL, which Parsons helped orchestrate, was completed, the stock value of the combined companies was about two hundred billion dollars. Executives from the new AOL Time Warner, as it was renamed, vowed that the company's size would spur new "synergies," and that it would realize extraordinary profit margins of thirty per cent and double its revenues every three years or so. The company fell far short of these projections, and Wall Street reacted savagely. By the time the company's chairman, Steve Case, and its C.E.O., Gerald Levin—who became pariahs to shareholders and, eventually, within Time Warner—were replaced by Parsons, the company had lost a hundred and twenty-five billion dollars' worth of value; the *Times* called it "the worst merger in business history," and it was hard to disagree.

Despite his central role, Parsons largely escaped blame for the merger. He is widely credited with bringing calm to the company, which includes the world's largest and most profitable movie and television production studio (Warner

MARK ULRIKSEN



Richard Parsons (left) said Icahn was "trapped in the past." Icahn said Parsons was "passive" and many C.E.O.s were "morons."

Bros.); the nation's second-largest cable system; its most profitable cable networks (Turner Broadcasting and HBO) and magazine group (Time Inc.); plus AOL. Time Warner's 2005 operating income, $4.5 billion, was more than twice that of Google, but the value of its stock is twenty-five billion dollars less. From Wall Street's perspective, the movie industry is shrinking, DVD sales are slowing, piracy is spreading, advertising is moving away from traditional media, and AOL is losing subscribers.

Parsons's remedies have been fairly conventional—an incremental sale of some assets, retooling AOL, and cost-cutting—and Icahn claimed that if Time Warner were broken into separate companies, and expenses were slashed, investors would boost its stock by between five and eight dollars per share. At one point, Icahn framed the issue as if it were not about money: "What's important to all this is that if we don't do something about managements and the way we manage—if we don't have a corporate democracy like you have a political democracy—the corporations have no accountability." His argument, in the words of his investment adviser Bruce Wasserstein, the managing partner of Lazard Frères, is that "Time Warner has been managed for the short term."

Parsons believed that Icahn's interest was purely short term. "Carl says, 'We're just trying to make money for shareholders,' " Parsons told me in January, over lunch in a private dining room decorated with Time Life photographs of Willie Mays, Duke Snider, and Mickey Mantle. "What he really means is that we're just trying to make as much money as we can as quickly as we can, through whatever means. We don't make things anymore in this country. Look at the derivatives business. It's just people trading money and taking a piece for their service effort. If this country is going to continue to make things, you have to have a different purview and time frame and a longer-range vision."

Parsons dismissed Icahn's contention that he is fighting for shareholders. "Nothing in his proposals has anything to do with that," he said. "It's all words. And, if we broke up the company, would Warner Bros. make better movies? Would the magazines be better? It's conceivable that if you bust up the company and seek to maximize returns you will chase your best talent. And, if the goal is only financial, what about the notion of journalistic integrity?" Of Icahn, Parsons added, "He's like a guy who is trapped in the past. The world has moved. You can't do greenmail anymore. You can call yourself a shareholder activist, but his game is the same."

Executives at Time Warner said privately that Icahn was like a basketball player who, with age, had lost his first step, his quickness. Parsons believed that Icahn wouldn't be able to induce other investors to join him, as Milken once did, because a new generation of investors would be averse to old media. Parsons also believed that Icahn's boast—"I'm a back-of-the-envelope sort of guy"—would not play well in the digital age.

"I'm not going to sugarcoat this," Icahn said in January. "I enjoy winning and making money. I've always been an obsessive character. I don't see a psychiatrist, but, if you really analyzed it, people like me are out to win, and winning is money." Later, Icahn wanted to add that it was "not only the money. Winning is also helping to change the outrageous way many of our corporations function."

Victoria Roberts

"We're watching television less and making our own fun more."

In Icahn's run at Time Warner, he often did seem like a man out of another time, and in many ways he was. He was born in Brooklyn in 1936, and reared in Queens, the only child of Bella and Michael Icahn. His mother was a fifth-grade public-school teacher; his father had been a high-school teacher and then trained to be an opera singer. Instead, Michael Icahn, with some bitterness, became a cantor at a local synagogue. Bella Icahn tried to steer Carl toward medicine. She was one of six siblings, and her younger brother, M. Elliot Schnall, said, "We were brought up with the idea that if you're a teacher you had a good job and a pension. Wall Street was for gamblers." Carl wasn't close to his parents: "My father was never able to accomplish anything. He was a strange guy. I never respected him." Of his mother, he said, "I respected her more than my father." The person he most admired was his uncle Elliot, who had gone to Yale, and who made enough money as an entrepreneur to retire at forty-five and move to Palm Beach.

At Far Rockaway High School, Carl learned how to box. "I had a temper," he said. "I sometimes scare myself I'm so obsessive." Once, getting into a fight with a boy who spit in his face, Carl became so enraged that he started banging his opponent's head on a staircase. "If I go over a certain line, I'm like another person," he said.

The summer after graduation, Carl got a job as a cabana boy in Lido Beach, where he watched rich men play poker. "I got four books on poker. I read them and knew more than they did. I won over a thousand dollars—like, thirty to fifty grand today." He went to Princeton, where he majored in philosophy, and paid half the tuition with his winnings. When he graduated, in 1957, he enrolled in N.Y.U.'s medical school. He was miserable. He dropped out after two and a half years.

In the spring of 1960, Carl joined the Army Reserves. "One of the reasons I went into the service is that once you joined you couldn't get out," he told Mark Stevens, who wrote "King Icahn: The Biography of a Renegade Capitalist." He won four thousand dollars in a few months playing poker, and with his winnings he bet on the stock market. With the help of his uncle Elliot, who wanted him to go to Wall Street, he got a job as a broker trainee at Dreyfus & Company.

Over the next several years, Icahn did well as an options trader. In 1968, he approached his uncle and said that he would put up a hundred and fifty thousand dollars he had saved to establish Icahn & Company if his uncle would invest, and buy him a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. Elliot Schnall wrote his nephew a check for four hundred thousand dollars.

Icahn, who is said to be the model for the slick Gordon Gekko character in the movie "Wall Street," wears suits that are often wrinkled; his tie is loose, and he has thick gray sideburns, worn unfashionably long, and bushy eyebrows. He tends not to look at people, and seems bored when someone else is speaking.

At Icahn & Company, he could be brusque; no one was allowed to touch anything on his cluttered desk, and he would scream and curse if a paper was moved. "He gets very hysterical," Schnall said. Icahn's exacting habits were perfect for what became a career as a corporate raider. In a memo to prospective investors, unearthed by Mark Stevens, Icahn wrote:

> It is our contention that sizeable profits can be earned by taking large positions in "undervalued" stocks and then attempting to control the destinies of the companies in question by: a) trying to convince management to liquidate or sell the company to a "white knight"; b) waging a proxy contest; c) making a tender offer and/or; d) selling back our position to the company.

"I'm looking for something slightly more perfect."

• •

"With this 'Icahn Manifesto,'" Stevens wrote, Icahn "had found a way to intimidate corporate America." Targeted companies would be sold, or corporate managers would panic and pay greenmail. An initial Icahn target was Tappan, an Ohio-based family-managed company that made kitchen appliances, whose stock was trading at half its book value. Icahn started buying Tappan stock in 1977, at just under eight dollars a share, and precipitated a proxy fight that concluded when Tappan was sold to Electrolux—the stock going for more than twice what Icahn paid. (Dick Tappan, the head of the company, later surprised his board by praising Icahn, and becoming an investor in Icahn & Company.)

Icahn decorated his office with the trophies—framed annual reports—of companies that he had hunted, among them Hammermill Paper, Marshall Field, and the textile manufacturer Dan River. Icahn was joined in the early eighties by, among others, Ivan F. Boesky; Kohlberg Kravis Roberts; T. Boone Pickens; and Milken. All got very rich. All accused their prey of selfish, short-term thinking. In Icahn's first mega-deal, in 1985, he joined Boesky and Drexel Burnham to attempt an eight-billion-dollar leveraged buyout of Phillips Petroleum, financed by junk bonds. To keep control of the company, the Phillips board voted to top the Icahn bid for its stock, thus giving Icahn a profit of more than fifty million dollars. When Icahn repeated the tactic with Texaco—driving up the share price and forcing Texaco to pay a large dividend (netting him more than three hundred million dollars) to end his pursuit—he solidified his reputation as a fierce corporate raider.

The first company that Icahn actually ran was the New York-based American Car & Foundry Company, which he bought in 1984, and which manufactures and leases railroad cars. He cut overhead and liquidated assets, boosting earnings, in three years, from five hundred thousand dollars to twenty-seven million. (Icahn still serves as chairman of A.C.F.) His next attempt at ownership—Trans World Airlines—was less successful. Although T.W.A. enjoyed a couple of years of improved profits, in part because of cost-cutting, Icahn, as the company's C.E.O., increased corporate debt by taking the airline private, sold assets, and stopped buying new airplanes or investing in new routes. The instincts that had helped him thrive as a corporate raider clashed with those of a business builder. Air travel dropped off after the 1991 Gulf War, T.W.A. filed for bankruptcy, and Icahn negotiated to sell his stake to the employees. "He is the most persistent person," Richard Magurno, who was T.W.A.'s senior vice-president and general counsel, and who today holds the same position at AirTran, said. "What I discovered with Carl is if you spend three weeks negotiating and he gets A and B and you get C and D, the next day he will call and say, 'Why did you get C and D?' At first, his style is irritating. Then it was great fun to negotiate with him." Was he honest? "Carl isn't really dishonest, but his cleverness borders on being sneaky," Magurno said. "You can't hold him to a spoken commitment. He just says it never happened."

By the nineties, Icahn had become a brand—the corporate raider. He owned an estate in Bedford, New York, and a silver Rolls-Royce. He had not been tarnished by scandal, despite his association with Boesky, who pleaded guilty to insider trading in 1986, and Milken, who was convicted of six felonies, including conspiring with Boesky to fix stock prices. (Boesky named Icahn as part of his plea bargain, and claimed that he had worked with Icahn to manipulate the share price of Gulf + Western. James Stewart, in his book "Den of Thieves," noted that prosecutors couldn't prove that the two men had "acted as a 'group,' within the meaning of the securities laws . . . even though their behavior had had virtually the same effect.")

When Drexel Burnham folded, Icahn became convinced that the bubble was about to burst. He scaled back and concentrated on bonds and select investments. He shorted Internet stocks, believing, correctly, that most of these were wildly inflated. Yet he was not having much fun as a passive investor, and, for his next act, he increased the stake he held in the Nabisco Group and made a bid for the company. The Philip Morris Companies won that contest, but Icahn and his investors made a profit of more than six hundred million dollars.

Icahn's personal life also had another act. In 1978, he had married a former Czech ballerina, Liba Trejbal, with whom he had a son and a daughter, born in 1979 and 1982. The couple separated in 1993, and that year Icahn moved into Manhattan to share an apartment with his longtime assistant, Gail Golden, a former broker, who was divorced and had two children. When he married Trejbal, Icahn had asked her to sign a prenuptial agreement, which gave her one and a half million dollars a year, a small fraction of his wealth. After a nasty behind-the-scenes dispute, Icahn settled, to avoid a public trial and embarrassment to his children. When the divorce became final, in 1999, Icahn married Golden.

The Icahns live in a duplex penthouse off Fifth Avenue, and have a weekend home in East Hampton. On a typical day, Golden told me, they get up at nine or nine-thirty, and "the first thing he does is get on the phone." Before having coffee or reading the newspapers, Icahn calls staff members and checks the market. He uses old technology—"He does not do e-mail himself," Golden said. Then they share a big breakfast, prepared by their cook. They walk several blocks to the General Motors Building, where Golden, who is in her mid-fifties, works afternoons from a small corner office on the floor below Icahn's. He stays at the office until eight or eight-thirty and is on the telephone until midnight, Golden told me, when "we take a bath together in this huge, huge tub I have, and watch 'Moneyline' or things we tape. This is an hour, generally speaking, of quiet time. He relaxes." Icahn usually goes to bed between 2 and 3 A.M.

The Icahns often spend vacations on a hundred-and-eighty-foot yacht that Icahn owns. Along with a crew of twelve, they are frequently accompanied by Elliot Schnall, Golden's children, and Icahn's children. Whether at sea or in port, Icahn is usually on the phone all day. He plays chess with his son, Brett, a Princeton graduate, who is an executive at Icahn's firm. "If Brett wins, Carl is pissed," Schnall said. "He'll say, 'I should not have made that move!' " Icahn appears to be thinking about posterity, and has begun to give away more money. Golden oversees his philanthropies, such as Icahn House, in the Bronx, which provides transitional housing for sixty-five families headed by women. A ten-million-dollar bequest built a state-of-the-art facility for track meets on Randall's Island; a large sign, visible day and night from the Triborough Bridge, says, "Icahn Stadium."

In 2004, Icahn announced that he would raise three billion dollars to start a hedge fund, Icahn Partners. Instead of the usual fees of one and a half per cent of the funds managed and twenty per cent of all net gains, Icahn said that he would impose a fee of 2.5 per cent and collect twenty-five per cent of the profits. He made a public bid to take control of the generic-drug manufacturer Mylan Laboratories, and, when the stock rose, Icahn sold his shares for a seventy-million-dollar profit. In early 2005, another hedge-fund manager, Barry Rosenstein, of JANA Partners, urged Icahn to invest heavily in the Kerr-McGee oil company. Soon Icahn was the largest individual shareholder, and he used his power to force the company to repurchase more of its own stock. The company's C.E.O., Luke Corbett, denounced Icahn's proposal—which would have required selling assets and acquiring more debt—as "tantamount to mortgaging the company's future simply to provide Mr. Icahn and his partners with some quick cash."

"One of the things common to poker and to negotiations is the importance of psychology," the attorney David Boies said. He got to know Icahn when they were on opposite sides in the Texaco fight, and now occasionally plays poker with him. "In poker, bluffing and sucking people into a hand you are strong in is just as important as getting people out when you have a weak hand." In the case of Kerr-McGee, the company threw in its hand; it agreed to buy back four billion dollars' worth of shares at a fifteen-per-cent premium, which gave Icahn a profit of more than a hundred million dollars. (Icahn also kept an investment of nearly six hundred million dollars in the company.)

With much less success, Icahn went after Blockbuster. In December, 2004, he announced that his nearly ten-per-cent ownership in the video-rental chain made him its largest individual shareholder, and he championed a merger between Blockbuster and a rival, Hollywood Entertainment. The merger did not occur. Icahn had also demanded that shareholders be paid a three-hundred-and-thirty-million-dollar dividend, and he waged a proxy fight to elect himself and two other dissidents to the seven-member board of directors. Icahn won the three seats, but he misjudged the business. "He operates on instinct," an Icahn adviser said. "He thought Blockbuster was a monopoly and was poorly run. He didn't know about Netflix and digital assets. He thought a commanding market share usually works. What he left out is that the market is rapidly declining." Blockbuster shares now trade at less than half the approximately eight dollars that Icahn paid for them.

Icahn's instincts told him that Time Warner was similarly undervalued—and that it had assets, such as AOL, that other "old media" companies lacked; by the summer of 2005 he had decided to plunge into the stock. "We needed to form a coalition of the willing—three partners with more than two billion dollars' worth of Time Warner stock—so we'd have some real skin in the game," Keith Meister, a senior investment adviser to Icahn, said. Among those who quickly signed on was Barry Rosenstein. "When Carl shows up in a stock, the stock moves immediately," Rosenstein said.

Last August, when Richard Parsons learned of Icahn's plan, he immediately did opposition research. Icahn, by contrast, knew only the outline of Parsons's biography, such as the fact that they both had roots in Queens; Parsons was brought up in South Jamaica. The six-foot-four Parsons attended the University of Hawaii, where he began dating Laura Bush, who is just under five feet tall and white. They married in their senior year, and moved to Albany, where he attended Albany Law School.

The year he took the bar exam, he received the highest grade in the state, and caught the attention of Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller's staff. Parsons soon began a long association with the Rockefeller family; he was deputy counsel to Rockefeller when Rockefeller was confirmed as Gerald Ford's Vice-President, and later served as the managing partner of a law firm that handled Rockefeller family business.

Parsons came to Time Warner's attention when Andrew Heiskell, the chairman of Time Inc., whom he had met while working for Rockefeller, introduced him to other top executives. (At

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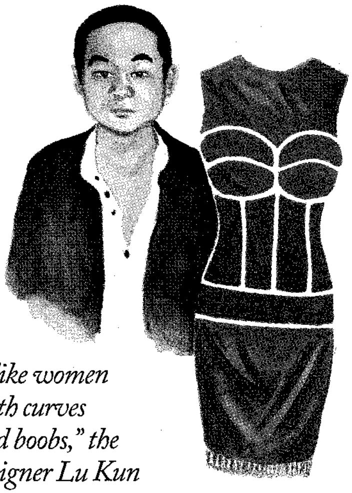
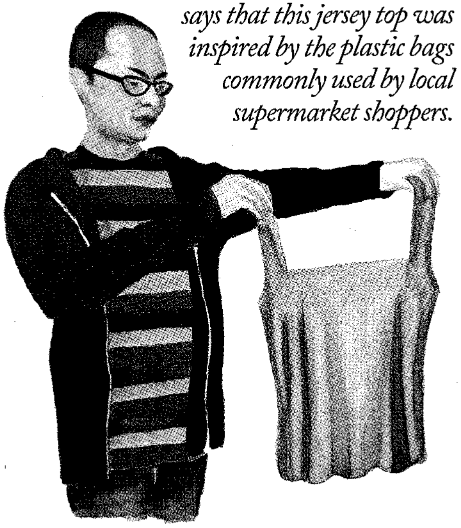
SKETCHBOOK BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

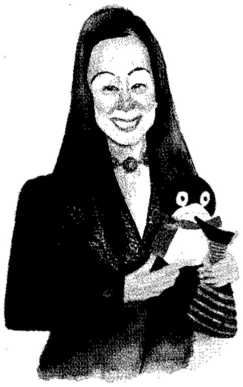
SHANGHAI STYLE



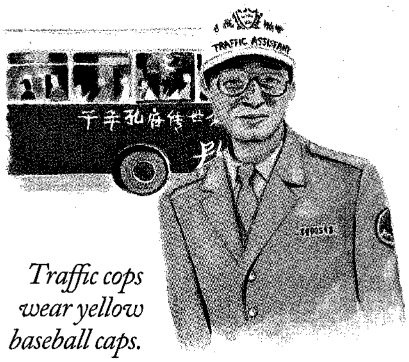
"I like women with curves and boobs," the designer Lu Kun says, explaining his shantung shift piped in braid.



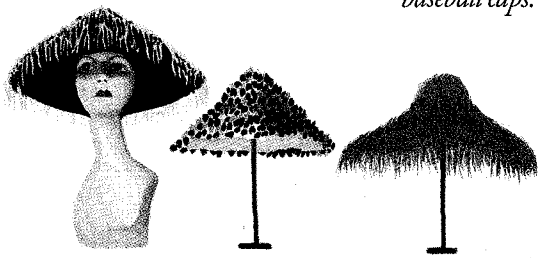
The designer Zhang Da says that this jersey top was inspired by the plastic bags commonly used by local supermarket shoppers.



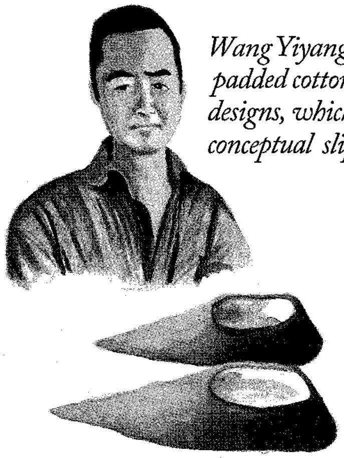
Vera Wang is named international designer of the year at the Chinese Fashion Awards. "As a Chinese-American, I am very proud to accept this award," she says.



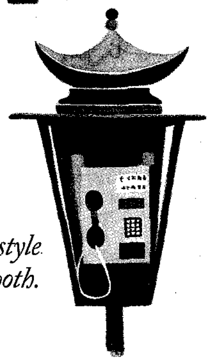
Traffic cops wear yellow baseball caps.



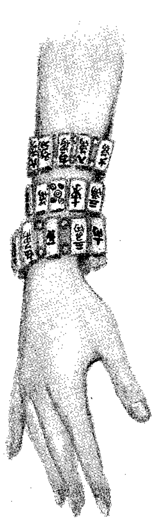
Feathered coolie hats at Shanghai Tang.



Wang Yiyang uses padded cotton for his designs, which include these conceptual slippers.



A pagoda-style phone booth.



Bracelets made from old mah-jongg tiles can be found in the main flea market.

the time, Parsons was the chairman and C.E.O. of the Dime Savings Bank.) He was invited to join the board in 1991, and by 1995—after a flirtation with politics that included the successful Giuliani run—Parsons was ready for a career change. When Gerald Levin, Time Inc.'s C.E.O., offered him the presidency of Time Warner—although not the position of chief operating officer—Parsons immediately accepted. By 1999, Parsons had won the confidence of the division heads, and Levin gave him the C.O.O. title as well. Parsons was one of the few Time Warner executives Levin confided in about the AOL deal, and, when the talks stalled, Parsons was sent to re-start them. "Dick has a directness and honesty and a sense of fairness and a sense that a negotiation is not about maximizing but about accommodation," AOL's chief negotiator, Kenneth Novack, said then. "I believe this deal got done because of Dick."

It was sometimes said of Parsons that he was a nice guy but allergic to conflict. Parsons once told me, "My job is to move around and cool out the younger ponies. I'm the pony horse." When Parsons became Time Warner's C.E.O., in 2002, the stock price was falling (it eventually dropped below ten dollars a share), corporate debt had climbed to thirty billion dollars, and government agencies were investigating whether AOL had altered its books prior to the merger. In the next three years, Parsons sold assets, cut corporate debt in half, won a truce with federal investigators, and acquired more cable systems. He also maneuvered Steve Case out as chairman (Case remained on the board), in 2003, and dropped the AOL name from the company's masthead. By 2005, Time Warner boasted that five of its businesses—Warner Bros., Turner Broadcasting, HBO, Time Inc., and Time Warner Cable—ranked ahead of their competitors in profitability. And even AOL, although it had suffered a ten-per-cent drop in subscriber revenues, still produced a profit of nearly $1.2 billion. "Dick is right to go slow," according to John Malone, the chairman of Liberty Media, who owns four per cent of Time Warner, and is its largest shareholder. Malone opposed Icahn's proposal to split the company: "The reality is that they have stabilized the company and put their legal troubles behind them."

By October, Icahn was criticizing Time Warner directors, including Parsons, for having allowed Time Warner to be acquired by AOL. He also charged that they had sold such assets as Warner Music and the company's half ownership of the Comedy Central cable network too cheaply, and that they ought to have won a bidding war for M-G-M. He accused the company of failing to address AOL's loss of seven million subscribers over three years, and, at the same time, its failure to evolve from its roots as an Internet service provider. He planned to mount a proxy showdown at the annual shareholders' meeting, in May.

Icahn was not Parsons's only critic. A former top AOL Time Warner executive observed, "Dick Parsons was the perfect man to right the boat. He did. But can he set sail? He once said to me, 'I don't have the fire in my belly to do this.' " A harsher critique comes from the C.E.O. of a large media company that has dealings with Time Warner but stayed on the sidelines of its fight with Icahn. With the leverage that comes from owning the second-largest cable system, he said, Parsons should have aggressively invested in cable networks, buying Court TV, USA, or the Sci-Fi Channel; and he should have started a gay network, as MTV did, and focussed more on fixing AOL. Summing up, the C.E.O. said, "You have to be a leader. You have to have a strategy. Parsons believes 'nice' is a value."

Icahn got indirect support from Steve Case, who resigned in October from the Time Warner board and recommended, in an op-ed piece for the Washington *Post*, "that it would be best to 'undo' the

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and cast iron,

the clamp-on meat-mincer,
the double flywheeled water pump,

it dug its heels in among wooden tubs
and troughs of slops,

hotter than body heat
in summertime, cold in winter

as winter's body armor,
a barrel-chested breastplate

standing guard
on four braced greaves.

"This is the way that God sees life,"
it said, "from seedling-braird to snedder,"

as the handle turned
and turnip heads were let fall and fed

to the juiced-up inner blades,
"This is the turnip cycle,"

as it dropped its raw sliced mess,
bucketful by glistering bucketful.

—*Seamus Heaney*

merger by splitting Time Warner into several independent companies and allowing AOL to set off on its own path." Case said that the promised synergies between divisions and the profit growth touted by "analysts" had never occurred, and that the company had sapped AOL's entrepreneurial spirit while competitors like Google and Yahoo! raced past it.

Time Warner executives blamed Case, not "analysts," for poor judgment. The former chairman of Time Warner's Media & Communications Group, Don Logan, to whom AOL reported, said, "AOL was entrepreneurial in building e-mail and chat. They invented that. Then, as all this content became available on the Internet, they were like a one-trick pony." He added, "When the world changed, they weren't ready for it." Jeffrey Bewkes, a Parsons deputy, rejects the view that AOL was ever poised to be the next Google or Yahoo! Case and his team, he said, had failed to plan for a time when the company would depend more on advertising than on dial-up subscribers, and the result, he added, "required us to change the company entirely."

Parsons did not attack Case—he leaves that to his deputies—but of Icahn he said, "Basically, Icahn is saying, 'Everything you did was wrong.' When we actually effected a sale, we 'sold too cheaply.' When we bought something, we 'bought too expensively.' When we missed a pitch, it's because we 'didn't want to bid enough.' " He was particularly irritated when Icahn noted that the private-equity buyers of Warner Music were "able to find two hundred and fifty million in cost savings in just one year of ownership," and raise the market value of Warner Music. This criticism strengthened Parsons's conviction that Icahn's idea of a business strategy was ruthless cost-cutting. "You run a business differently depending on what your objectives are," Parsons said. "If your objective is to build a great business, you want to run it differently than you would if your objective is to realize its current value and take out as much as you can in the hope the residue can make it." Under its private-equity owners, he said, Warner Music has gutted its investment in new music acts. "They're living off their catalogue."

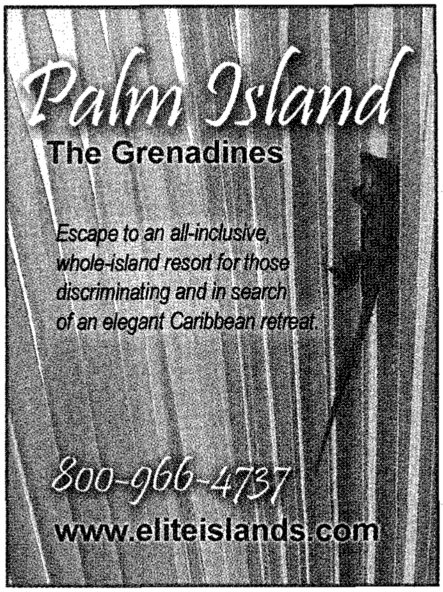
Probably the most resonant Icahn criticism was the assault on Time Warner's board. Time Warner employees have watched the value of their stock and their pensions plunge. A Time Warner vice-president said, "The most interesting argument Icahn makes is how the board that allowed Gerry to do what he did"—Levin's merger with AOL—"is still there." He exempted Parsons from this criticism. James Barksdale, the former C.E.O. of Netscape, who serves as a director, noted that the board had paid penalties. "I don't argue with the claim that it was a mistake," he said. "But it changed the membership of the board. Directors lost money. Top executives lost their jobs."

From September to November, Parsons and Icahn spoke three or four times by telephone, and in that period Icahn said, "I don't think he perceived me as a threat at all." But Time Warner was certainly paying attention. Parsons said, "On the one hand, the guy has no traction, so why pay attention? But I have employees who read the papers every day." And Parsons had spent too many years in politics not to know that "throw the rascals out" was a compelling message. The former baseball commissioner Fay Vincent, a Time Warner director who is close to Parsons, was concerned that the battle took Parsons's "head away from the game." He went on, "Dick told us he was spending forty per cent of his time on a weekly basis meeting shareholders and in a defensive mode with people and the press."

Barry Meyer, the C.E.O. of Warner Bros., told me in January, "Everybody's kind of sitting back and worrying what he'll do next." Since his is the leading studio, he said, "this is the time for us to be bold and aggressive." He went on, "Last year, we put out a slate of twenty-five films, big blockbuster movies and movies that might not make a lot of money but get critical attention"—he mentioned "Good Night, and Good Luck" and "The March of the Penguins." He added, "My fear is that if we get into a circle-the-wagon mode we will not be encouraged to take risks," as Time Warner's New Line studio did, spending hundreds of millions on the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

"I don't micromanage companies," Icahn said. "I'm saying that what happened to Time Warner is that you have thirty guys over there doing what one guy can do. I'm not telling you not to do 'Lord of the Rings.' "

In November, Parsons announced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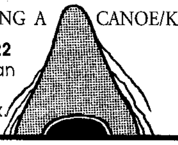

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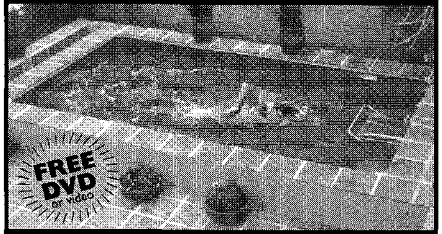

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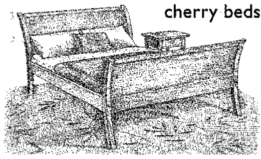
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that, over time, the company would buy back $12.5 billion in stock—more than twice its original proposal. Ann Moore, the C.E.O. of Time Inc., announced that the magazine group would cut a hundred and five employees, including some of its top managers. Icahn asked, Why did she wait so long? Because, Moore replied, when the magazine group was growing it needed the extra talent to launch new titles and to acquire others. "Today, of our ten most profitable titles one-half are less than fifteen years old," she said.

Icahn announced in late November that he had retained Bruce Wasserstein and Lazard to come up with a slate of directors to replace "a majority" of the Time Warner board, and to prepare a report that would recommend strategic initiatives to "unlock the value of Time Warner." There was certainly publicity value in hiring Wasserstein. But his alliance with Icahn's team was seen by some as an act of betrayal, because Wasserstein has a history of opposing raiders like Icahn. Parsons was particularly annoyed because Wasserstein had worked on behalf of Time Warner when it merged with AOL. Parsons usually conceals his anger, but when Wasserstein called, soon after the announcement, Parsons would not pick up the telephone. Instead, he asked his deputy Jeff Bewkes to tell a Wasserstein deputy that Parsons preferred to deal "principal to principal." Wasserstein's deputy responded, "Bruce considers himself a principal." Parsons said of Wasserstein, "He just wants to be in the center of the action." Wasserstein told me that it "would not be appropriate" to discuss private conversations.

Wasserstein, who advised Viacom on its recent split into two companies, is unapologetic about representing Icahn. He believes that media companies suffer from their size: internally, they become too cumbersome, and externally they tend to scare off investors, because they lack focus. "Carl and I had three discussions about Time Warner," he told me in January. "I would not have done it except that I like the structure of our relationship, and I'm interested in Time Warner, and I believe that what we're doing is the right thing. And I like Carl." Lazard was paid a fee of five million dollars to present Icahn's vision, in a book-length report, and to help mount the proxy fight. A larger payoff was to come with a rise in the value of Time Warner's stock—Wasserstein was to get a percentage of Icahn's profit. "We have the same incentive that Icahn has," Wasserstein said. Another payoff would come if Lazard became the preferred investment bank for Wall Street's new hedge funds and private-equity investors. "The most compelling thing going on now is that private-equity firms are sitting on maybe three hundred billion dollars' worth of cash to invest," John Malone said. He added, "This is like Mike Milken has come back to life."

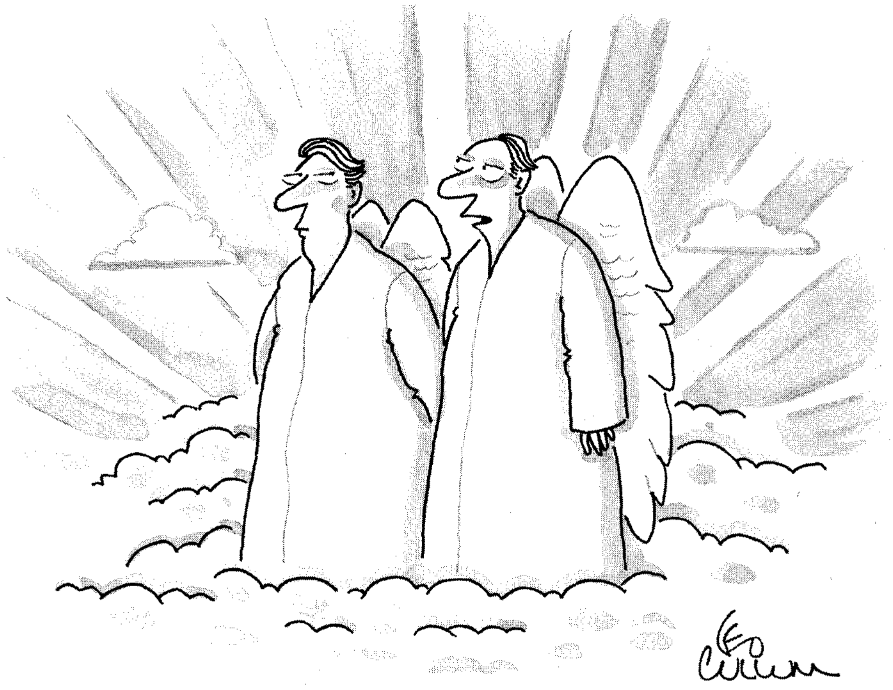
Before Wasserstein's report was ready, Icahn had moved far beyond his original proposal to spin off the cable division. He envisioned Time Warner divided into four companies: cable, AOL, publishing, and a combined content company consisting of the Hollywood studios and the cable networks. The battle also became more personal—as if Icahn had in fact gone "over a certain line." To the *Financial Times*, he said of Parsons, "I don't find him a sympathetic figure," and claimed that Parsons had sold seven hundred thousand shares of his Time Warner stock in 2001, at a price just above fifty dollars a share: "I don't see how it can help the morale of employees whose share options have not gone anywhere since he took over that the supposed skipper of the ship sold his shares a long time ago and made a lot of money." (Edward I. Adler, Parsons's chief spokesman, said that the options represented just eight per cent of the more than nine million shares and options that Parsons retains.) Word got out that Icahn had called Parsons a moron, prompting Parsons to joke that his wife, Laura, told him, "He called you a moron? That's my job!" In fact, Icahn didn't say that, but in speeches he refers to corporate C.E.O.s as a "not too bright" class of "morons." He has described Parsons as "I, Claudius," the accidental emperor, who "was there at the right time."

In mid-December, Parsons and Time Warner announced that Google would pay a billion dollars for a five-per-cent stake in AOL and establish a strategic partnership. Time Warner could claim that this put AOL's value at twenty billion dollars—twice what it had been two years earlier. Icahn attacked Time Warner for "letting the Trojan horse in," and asserted that Google had somehow—he did not say how—triumphed. But among the audience that counts in a proxy fight—institutional investors, who control the largest blocks of stock—Icahn's assaults did not go over well. Gordon Crawford, the portfolio manager of Capital Research Global Investors, which has reduced its holdings in Time Warner stock but retains a sizable portfolio, said in a telephone conversation that Icahn was "wrong on his math. It's not worth twenty-six dollars" a share; he also said that Icahn did not wholly grasp his subject. "I don't think Carl really understands the media business," he said. "The final thing is, he doesn't understand how the Internet works, and, in particular, how the search function is monetized." Icahn insisted, "I understand how Google makes its money," but he conceded, "I don't understand the digital world." And, despite Icahn's efforts, Time Warner's stock did not budge; Icahn was further embarrassed when word leaked out that many of those he had talked to about running on his proxy slate had demurred.

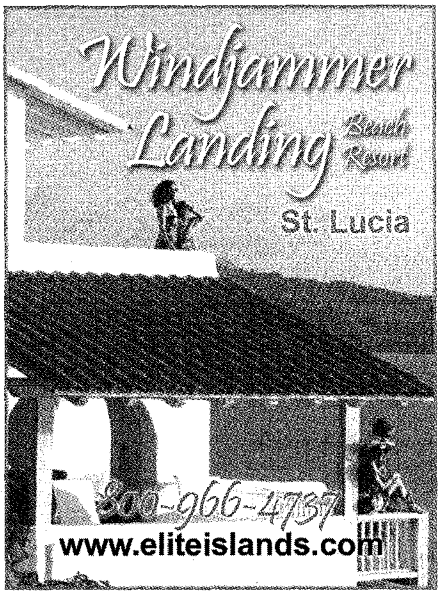
Parsons tried to keep his opponent on the defensive. In late December, he promoted Bewkes to become president and C.O.O., and on CNBC he called him "probably the most talented executive in the media and entertainment space." Icahn then telephoned CNBC's Maria Bartiromo and declared of Bewkes, on the air, "I certainly take exception to Dick Parsons saying he's the best in the media business." Parsons also engineered two moves suggesting that Time Warner was not passive: the WB broadcast network was merged with CBS's UPN network; and the company sold to a French firm its profitable but relatively small publishing operation, the Time Warner Book Group.

By now, Parsons was convinced that Icahn's position was weak. "He's done everything wrong," Parsons told me in mid-January. "The fight doesn't even get cooking for another month or two, and he's already done his bag of tricks." He faulted Icahn for announcing his plans before Wasserstein had formulated them; for the cardinal sin, in politics, of appealing to the wrong audience (in this case, the press rather than the shareholders); and for not knowing enough about the company he was stalking.

Parsons once said that his most valuable business lesson was that in a negotiation it's important to reach a result where both sides can claim victory. I reminded him of this, and asked how, with the stock price stalled, Icahn would be able to claim victory. "I just don't know," he replied. Parsons was nevertheless worried that Icahn had an "image" to uphold among investors, as a "tenacious shareholder activist." And he was worried about the toll of a war. "My view is that everybody suffers casualties in war," he said. "The



"I don't want to let being dead define me."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winner is just the guy who suffers the fewest casualties." So, he said, "I probably will end up talking to Carl one more time before it is, quote, too late."

On January 20th, Parsons and Icahn held another private meeting and, once again, there was no middle ground. Icahn told Parsons that he planned to run a slate that included a rival C.E.O., whom Icahn declined to name. To Parsons, Icahn was little changed from the greenmail artist of the eighties—just a guy trying "to make a big buck and move on." To Icahn, Parsons was a politician, not a tough-minded businessman. Before he left, the equable Parsons said, "Let's keep the doors of communication open." After the meeting, Icahn told me, "Parsons is a nice guy, the kind of guy you would meet for a drink. But I question whether he's the guy to run Time Warner."

Icahn doesn't care whether people think of him as nice. He talks about shareholder democracy, but it often sounds like someone adding frills to a dress to hide a bulging waistline. Parsons wants to win and make money, too, but he is using a different scorecard. The problem with Icahn and his allies, Parsons said, is that "they don't understand the importance of the human equation in management. This doesn't mean they are not smart. Kirk Kerkorian is smart. But he once told me, 'I never made money in the movie business. I made money selling the movie business.'" Employees, Parsons added, "want to believe in what they do. They want to believe it has value." Icahn would say that this is the difference between an owner and a manager. And, unlike Parsons, Icahn, the poker player, does not like to split pots.

The gap between Icahn's reputation and his performance in the battle with Time Warner kept growing. He flailed away at Parsons, but often had his facts wrong—as with the insinuation that Parsons had sold all his stock. He asserted that Time Warner "is not doing as well as some of its peers," but backed off when asked for proof. "Time Warner is not doing so well at its magazines," he said, although Time Inc. generated a billion dollars in profits last year and is the industry profit leader. He said that the Google deal precluded AOL from making other deals, which Time Warner denies. He said that Time Warner "is terribly managed," but praised some of its division chiefs.

Icahn's reputation suffered again in late January, when he announced his candidate to replace Parsons—Frank Biondi, the former Viacom and Universal Studios C.E.O. On the surface, Biondi seemed an odd choice. Icahn said that he had met him only once before. And, fairly or not, he had lost his previous two C.E.O. jobs because he was said to be the sort of incrementalist that Icahn disparaged.

More ridicule was heaped on Icahn with the release, on February 7th, of the Lazard report. In the ballroom of the St. Regis Hotel, Icahn, Wasserstein, and Biondi faced an audience of nearly five hundred reporters, analysts, and shareholders. The report, which was three hundred and forty-three pages long, was distributed only moments before the briefing, and no one had time to seriously question it. But one could see skeptical looks when Wasserstein declared that Time Warner's mismanagement had lost shareholders "a staggering forty billion dollars," and when he said that if the company was split in four shareholders would gain as much as eight dollars and twenty-one cents per share. When it was Biondi's turn, he praised Jeff Bewkes—he hoped that Bewkes would stay on to become the C.E.O. of what he called the "content" division. When Icahn was asked whether he agreed, he said, "I don't know Bewkes." Wasserstein, who fielded most of the questions, kept insisting, unpersuasively, that his report "is not an attack on Dick Parsons." It extolled shareholder democracy, yet proposed a Dutch auction that would benefit only some shareholders.

The St. Regis performance was panned by Wall Street analysts and the press. "I could see from that reaction that I was not going to get the analysts behind us and to beat the drums for us," Icahn told me later. He also said, "The hedge funds are not coming in, because they don't believe in 'old' media companies." And the mutual funds thought that his proposals were "too radical." Bewkes, like his colleagues, believes that size gives Time Warner advantages—that, by owning cable systems, it was able to launch HBO-on-demand and that, by owning AOL, it will figure out how to put the Warner Bros. video library online.

The day after the St. Regis presentation, Icahn called Parsons. He said that he wanted to avert the war he had promised. Parsons said that he, too, was eager for a truce, and volunteered to come to Icahn's office. Parsons wanted to avoid the kind of proxy fight that embarrassed Michael Eisner and the board of Walt Disney. Icahn wanted to preserve his "brand" by claiming at least a partial victory. Word soon leaked that Icahn would offer only five candidates for the Time Warner board—not fourteen—and none of them familiar names.

In the next nine days, Parsons and Icahn talked often. The talks did not always go smoothly. Parsons said, "Carl was boring in on this Dutch auction. He never moved off that." Parsons told Icahn that the large shareholders wanted to stay in the stock and resented paying a bonus to those who, like Icahn, presumably wanted to get out. "I don't believe that," Icahn told him, but after he did his own research he changed his mind and dropped the Dutch-auction plan. The breakup of the company was off the table. "I learned there were tax reasons not to split off cable," Icahn said, conceding that he and his team hadn't foreseen the tax liability. (Wasserstein denied missing this; when I raised the question, he e-mailed, "taxes fully understood.") At one point, Parsons reportedly said, "Carl, why are we making war? Even if you win the proxy fight, you will only have a minority of the board. And my business is persuading people to side with me. You put those five people on my board and in a month they'll be on my side."

By February 16th, Icahn's seventieth birthday, he and Parsons had reached an agreement. Icahn would abandon the proxy fight. Parsons agreed to raise the share repurchase plan to Icahn's proposed twenty billion dollars; Time Warner would cut expenses by another five hundred million dollars; Parsons would "consult" with Icahn and other major shareholders about filling two board vacancies with independent directors; and Time Warner would review the Lazard report and continue to talk with Icahn. They shook hands. However, when Icahn went back to the other hedge-fund investors, they insisted on naming two independent directors. Parsons flatly refused. By noon the next day, Icahn had surrendered this demand, too.

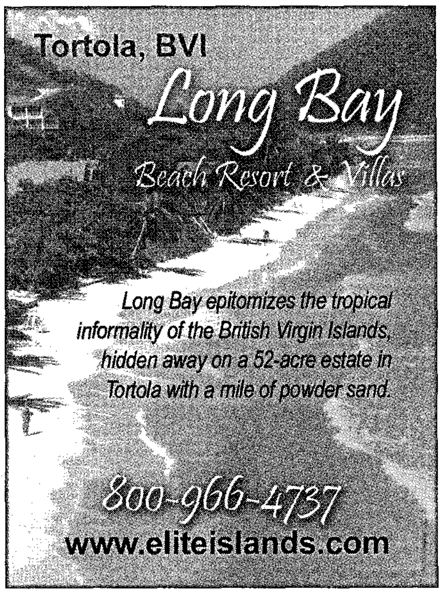
On one essential point there was nothing for Icahn: the stock never rose. In seven months of maneuvering, Icahn could have earned more money from a bank deposit. Frank Biondi, who was paid six million dollars for several weeks of work, said, "The negotiations played to Dick's strengths. One of his great skills is finding the middle ground that everyone is comfortable with."

In late February, I stopped by Icahn's office and asked if his battle with Time Warner would be remembered as a great defeat. "In fairness," he said, "I thought the stock would move. I thought the hedge funds would come in. But I ran into this wall of pessimism about these companies."

I said that he sounded like Parsons, whom he once denounced for saying that there was little Time Warner could do in the near term to move Wall Street and the stock price. "You're not going to change markets," he said, with a sigh. "It's like you're a good swimmer, but some tidal wave is hitting you."

Despite this setback, Icahn did not relax; he began a corporate takeover battle against a giant South Korean tobacco company. And he insisted that he was a long-term investor in Time Warner. "People say that markets tell you something," he said. "The market doesn't. Several years ago, when I bought oil stocks, casinos, and railcars, the market said they were a bad investment. They were being given away. I still own them. We'll be talking a year or two from now and we'll see this was one of the great opportunities to buy this kind of company, with content and cable. Look at Time Warner Cable. You have fourteen million subscribers. If you can get just ten dollars more a month from them, that's $1.4 billion a year. You have fifty million Home Box Office subscribers. What does it take to ask them to pay two dollars, three dollars more a month? I'm sold on this company. I plan to make money in it. And, if Dick Parsons doesn't do anything, I'm still going to be here."

Parsons did what good politicians do: he shared credit and he didn't gloat. Icahn, he said, got "us to examine the speed with which we were doing things and to accelerate." He added, "I'm not saying it was a constructive exercise, but some constructive things came out of it." ♦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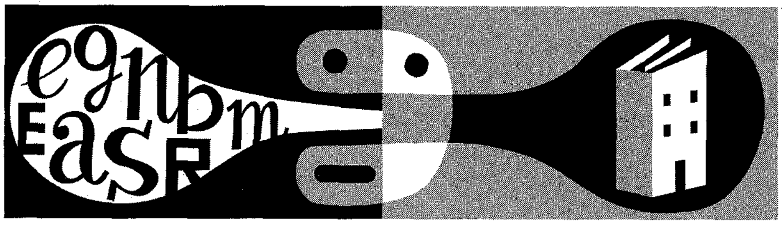
THE CRITICS



BOOKS

THE GIRLS NEXT DOOR

Life in the centerfold.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Hugh Hefner, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Playboy*, always said that his ideal for the magazine's famous Playmate of the Month, the woman in the centerfold photo, was "the girl next door with her clothes off." In other words, he was trying to take his readers back to a time before their first sexual experience, a time when they still liked their stuffed bear and thought that a naked woman might be something like that. Taschen has just published "The Playmate Book: Six Decades of Centerfolds" ($39.99), by Gretchen Edgren, a contributing editor to *Playboy*, and the book is a testament to Hefner's fidelity to his vision. Six hundred and thirteen women are represented, but there is one basic model. On top is the face of Shirley Temple; below is the body of Jayne Mansfield. *Playboy* was launched in 1953, and this female image managed to draw, simultaneously, on two opposing trends that have since come to dominate American mass culture: on the one hand, our country's idea of its Huck Finn innocence; on the other, the enthusiastic lewdness of our advertising and entertainment. We are now accustomed to seeing the two tendencies combined—witness Britney Spears—but when Hefner was a young man they still seemed like opposites. Hence the surprise and the popularity of *Playboy*. The magazine proposed that wanton sex, sex for sex's sake, was wholesome, good for you: a novel idea in the nineteen-fifties.

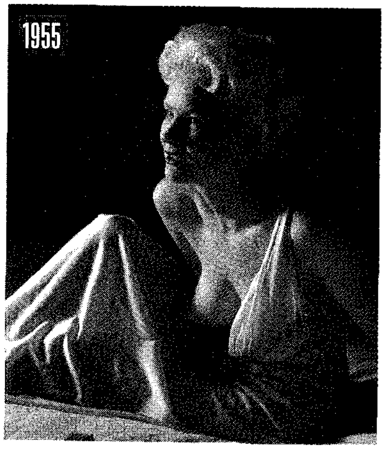
When Hefner started out, he couldn't afford to commission centerfold photos, nor did he know any women who would take their clothes off at his bidding. So he bought girlie pictures from a local calendar company, and he chose well. In his first issue, he ran a nude photograph that Marilyn Monroe, famous by 1953, had posed for in 1949, when she was not famous, and needed money. It made the first issue a hit. Within a year, *Playboy* was able to afford its own photography, at which point the calendar girls were swept aside in favor of the girls next door. Unlike their predecessors, these girls tend to have their nipples covered, and they are not brazenly posing but, oops, caught by the photographer as they are climbing out of the bath or getting dressed. Several have on regulation-issue white underpants, up to the waist; one wears Mary Janes.

A decade later, the innocence has become less innocent, more self-aware—in a word, sixties. Now we get racial equality. (The first African-American Playmate appeared in 1965.) We get the great outdoors: Playmates taking sunbaths, unpacking picnics, hoisting their innocent bottoms into hammocks. Above all, we get youth. In January of 1958, the magazine had published a centerfold of a sixteen-year-old girl, with the result that Hefner was hauled into court for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. (The case was dismissed. Miss January had written permission from her mother.) After that, he made a rule that *Playboy* would never again publish a photograph of an unclothed woman under eighteen, but in the following years he did everything in his power to make the centerfold models look like jailbait. Two of the sixties Playmates have pigtails, tied with bows. One is reading the funny papers. Most of them have chubby cheeks, and flash us sweet smiles. At the same time, many of these nice little girls are fantastically large-breasted. Strange to say, this top-loading often makes them appear more childlike. The breasts are smooth and round and pink; they look like balloons or beach balls. The girl seems delighted to have them, as if they had just been delivered by Santa Claus.

Now and then over the years, Hefner experimented with small- or smallish-breasted Playmates. In late 1960, he had a serious fit of restraint: Joni Mattis, Miss November of that year, is posed in such a way as to cover not just her chest but most of her bottom. According to "The Playmate Book," this centerfold was the least popular that the magazine ever published. Mattis received exactly one letter, from a clergyman advising her to find another line of work. By contrast, DeDe Lind, Miss August 1967, who looks to be about thirteen, and who displays, together with a big yellow hair ribbon, a pair of knockers rivalling Mae West's, got more fan letters than any Playmate before or after. *Playboy* learned a lesson from DeDe: breasts count. At the end of "The Playmate Book," we are given the average measurements of the Playmates from the sixties to the present: a modest 35-23-35. I don't believe this. Or, if it's true, there's more to photography than I understand. In response to the *Playboy* centerfolds, *Esquire* eliminated its own pinups, the celebrated George Petty and Alberto Vargas drawings. In the words of Clay Felker, an editor at *Esquire* at that time, "*Playboy* out-titted us." Hefner then had the field to himself. By the end of the sixties, one-fourth of all American college men were buying his magazine every month.

In the nineteen-seventies, because of competition from the new and rauncher *Penthouse*, *Playboy* made the decision to show pubic hair, and with this upping of the sexual ante a certain coldness set in. Now the makeup becomes very heavy, causing the women, who already looked alike, to seem as if they were clones. (If the book's text didn't tell

COURTESY PLAYBOY ENTERPRISES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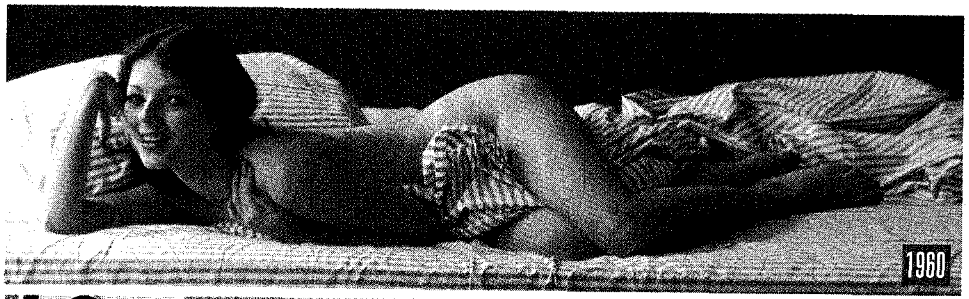
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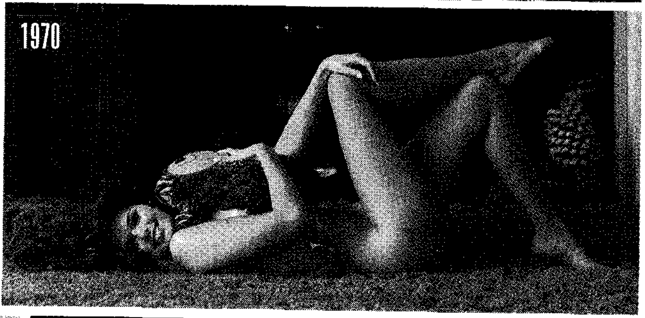
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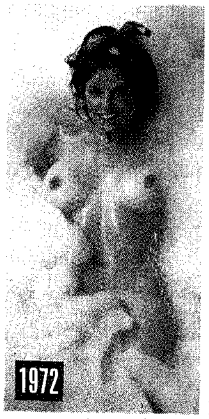
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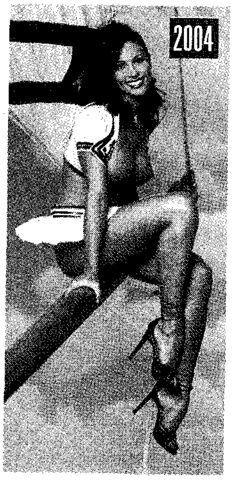
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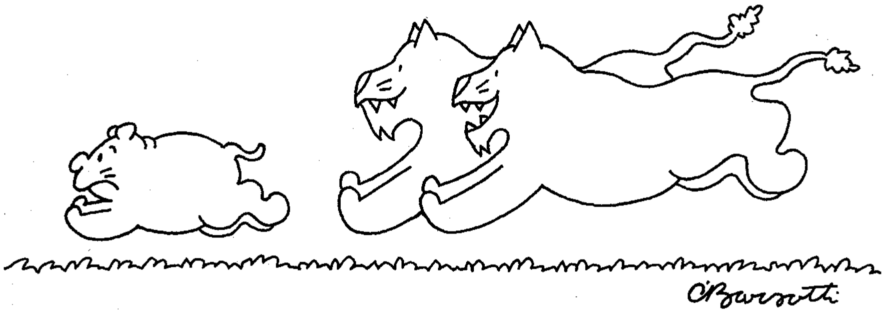
us that Miss June 1971 was Japanese-American, we would never guess it.) The setting also becomes sleeker. Hefner said from the beginning that he was not producing a girlie magazine; *Playboy* was a "life style" magazine, of which sex was only a part. He was put off by the men's magazines of his youth, with their emphasis on riding the rapids and fighting bears. Why did virility have to be proved outdoors? Why couldn't its kingdom be indoors? "We like our apartment," he wrote in his editorial for the first issue of *Playboy*. "We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an hors d'œuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting in a female for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex." Whatever one may think of DeDe Lind's interest in Nietzsche—or Hefner's, for that matter—this was the scenario he had in mind. He grew up in a comfortless Chicago family. His father was an accountant, his mother a Methodist disciplinarian. He has said that there was never any show of affection in his house. One suspects that there was likewise little evidence of jazz or hors d'œuvres—pleasure for its own sake. This is what he set out to sell: an upscale hedonism, promoted by the magazine's articles and ads as well as by its nudes.

In 1956, looking to raise the tone, Hefner hired Auguste Comte Spectorsky, an East Coast sophisticate, as his editorial director, and Spectorsky brought in fiction by Vladimir Nabokov, James Baldwin, and the like. But to the history of journalism, and probably to the readers, too, *Playboy's* fiction was far less important than its interviews, inaugurated in 1962. Among the subjects were Miles Davis, Peter Sellers, Bertrand Russell, Malcolm X, Billy Wilder, Richard Burton, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jimmy Hoffa, Albert Schweitzer, Nabokov, Jean Genet, Ingmar Bergman, Dick Gregory, Henry Miller, Cassius Clay, and George Wallace, and that's just for the first three years. The questioning was long (seven to ten hours) and confrontational. Presumably for that reason—and maybe, too, because this was a skin magazine and what the hell—the subjects often said what they did not say elsewhere. As a result, their words are still being quoted.

In 1959, with the money rolling in, Hefner bought a palatial house in Chicago and spent four hundred thousand dollars, a fabulous sum in those days, on its renovation. The magazine repeatedly ran photo features on this seventy-room "Playboy Mansion": the vast ballroom, presided over by two burnished suits of medieval armor; the indoor swimming pool with a glass side, so that from downstairs, on party nights (Friday and Sunday, without fail), you could watch the other guests skinny-dipping; and, most important, Hefner's bedroom, with a round bed that could accommodate twelve. (He liked group sex.) The house also had a girls' dormitory, and after 1960, when Hefner's corporation opened the first of its Playboy clubs, in Chicago—there were eventually forty Playboy clubs, casinos, and resort hotels in the United States and abroad—many of the waitresses, the highly publicized Bunnies, lived there. Most of the women who were being photographed for the centerfold also stayed at the Mansion. Hefner says that during some years he was "involved" with maybe eleven out of twelve months' worth of Playmates.

In the seventies, the Playmates tended to be photographed not outdoors but in a setting that bespoke the editor's deluxe headquarters—wood-panelled rooms with Oriental carpets and brocade upholstery. It's very clear that the woman in the photograph does not live there; she's just staying the night. By this time, the centerfold was flanked by a lot of auxiliary material. There was a bio of the Playmate, its information no doubt heavily airbrushed. There was also a "Playmate Data Sheet," where the woman, in a sort of Catholic-schoolgirl handwriting (which, curiously, was the same from month to month), listed her goals in life, her favorite movies, and so on. There were also side photos, in which, released from the master's library, the Playmate is shown in more natural situations—taking a shower, walking on the beach—and finally she looks sexy. But in the centerfold she is stuck in the Ralph Lauren world of Hefner's imagining, and she looks as though she were thinking about how much she's going to be paid and whether, in consequence, she can get brocade like that for her couch.

In the nineteen-eighties and thereafter, the artificiality only increased, as did that of all American mass media. The most obvious change is in the body, which has now been to the gym. Before, you could often see the Playmates sucking in their stomachs. Now they don't have to. The waist is nipped, the bottom tidy, and the breasts are a thing of wonder. The first mention of a "boob job" in "The Playmate Book" has to do with Miss April 1965, but, like hair coloring, breast enlargement underwent a change of meaning, and hence of design, in the seventies and eighties. At first, its purpose was to correct nature, and fool people into thinking that this was what nature made. But over time the augmented bosom became confessedly an artifice—a *Ding an sich*, and proud of it. By the eighties, the Playmates' breasts are not just huge. Many are independent of the law of gravity; they point straight outward. One pair seems to point upward. Other features look equally doctored. The pubic hair becomes elegantly barbered—the women favor a Vandyke—or, in a few cases, is removed altogether. This was part of an increased explicitness. With the shrinking of the pubic hair, the labia majora become visible. From the seventies onward, the magazine now and then offered twin Playmates, even a set of triplets—all in the same bed, of course—and with them



"Well, whatever it is, it has an amusing will to live."

comes the first whiff of lesbianism. In Mirjam and Karin van Breeschooten's centerfold, Mirjam is casually unlacing her twin's teddy.

Much of the costuming is standard erotic wear: lace and leather. The poses, too, are often traditional. Again and again, we see the full-frontal stance with the *déhanchement*—said to have been discovered by the sculptor Polyclitus in the fifth century B.C.—in which the body's weight is shifted onto one leg, thus creating two different, beautiful curves at the two sides of the waist. But, not infrequently, the magazine—or Hefner, for he is said to have carefully controlled all the centerfold shots—gets bored with these time-honored arrangements and puts the women in poses that no one else ever dreamed of. Isn't it hurting Miss December 1966's bottom, you think, to have it propped on the edge of those piano keys? That stereo turntable that Miss January 2004 is splayed over: Is it a B. & O.? How much is the repairman going to charge? Strangest of all are the scenarios in which the women are presented to us. Miss December 1992 is our waitress at the diner. She wears a collar and cuffs, a sporty little hat, red pumps, and nothing else. The magazine, in other words, has ceased trying to imagine a situation in which a woman might conceivably be naked; it has just come up with any situation—the girl might be receiving the Nobel Prize—and then removed the clothes. How much irony is operating here? I don't know. Maybe none. In the introduction to "The Playmate Book," Hefner says that looking through these pages should be "not unlike visiting your high school reunion."

The models don't seem to have shared his view. In a 2002 article in *The New York Review of Books*, Janet Malcolm remarked on Irving Penn's tendency to crop the heads of his nudes: "There does not seem to be any way that a naked person in front of a camera can fail to betray his or her sense of the . . . inherent silliness or pathos of the situation. Whether the object of the exercise is art photography or pornography, the model does not know what to do with her face." If Penn's subjects were stymied, so were the Playmates, but of course their heads weren't cropped, and Hefner wanted them to look straight into the camera. The poor girls either smiled ("We're going to have a good time") or snarled ("Come and get me, big boy"). Both seem equally fake.

What did these women think of the job they were doing? For "The Playmate Book," Gretchen Edgren and her staff put a lot of questions to the centerfold alumnae, and the women's answers, though no doubt edited with care, tell us a lot—above all, that for many of the models the centerfold was simply a career move. "I didn't come from money," Kerri Kendall, Miss September 1990, points out, and many of her sister Playmates would probably say amen to that. When they were offered the centerfold, some were posing for calendars; others were waitressing at Hooters or working in hair salons. Several were single mothers. And though a few tell of having to change their names so as not to embarrass the folks back home, others report that their families urged them to seize this opportunity. Miss March 1968 got into *Playboy* because her grandmother wrote to the magazine, "My granddaughter is much better looking and much bustier than any of the girls you've been shooting."

The fee for a centerfold shoot was five hundred dollars in the fifties. Today, it is twenty-five thousand dollars. That's a lot of money. Miss December 1973 used her earnings to make the down payment on her parents' house. But the fee was only a start. What these women wanted, and hoped the centerfold would get them, was a career in modelling or acting. Many went on to such work, though not at the high end. The blond bombshell Anna Nicole Smith, Miss May 1992, modelled for Guess jeans, but others are more likely to speak of swimsuit or lingerie ads, and, especially, of beer ads. As for the Playmates' acting history, the statement on Miss October 1999's page—"On screen, Jodi's best known as Ramdar, the 'Super Hot Giant Alien Chick' from 'Dude, Where's My Car' "—more or less sums it up. But film jobs seem to have been gravy. Miss July 1973 reports having appeared, presumably as a hostess, on "every game show ever created by man." Another says that she did "about a hundred rock videos." The lucky ones got roles in soap operas or sitcoms. Miss January 1957 went on to be David Nelson's wife on "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" and in life.

Marriage, of course, was another thing the Playmates had in mind, and several of them landed rock musicians or professional athletes. Anna Nicole Smith bagged an eighty-nine-year-old oil billionaire, J. Howard Marshall, and after his death, the following year, became entangled in a long series of lawsuits with his family over the estate—a joy to the tabloids. The case finally went to the Supreme Court earlier this month. For her appearance, Smith wore a little black dress and a big silver cross. The court's decision will be rendered by the end of June.

Not surprisingly, however, many of the Playmates, once they passed their twenties, fell back into regular life. One is a dental hygienist for dogs and cats, two are cops, one taught creative writing at the City University of New York. Several have become artists. Miss September 1998 is a "traditional Aztec dancer"; Judy Tyler, Miss January 1966, creates "Fronds by Judea—original art from palm trees." Miss July 1999 is making "hip-hop action sports videos" with her boyfriend. "I want to be taken seriously," she says, "because I intend to be a good producer one day." Quite a few of the ex-Playmates, in keeping with the book's insistent claim of normality, list their families as their sole and beloved project. At the same time, the text is very forthcoming about how many divorces these women have had, and how a number of them are no longer eager to have a man in the house. Several Playmates have found God. Debra Jo Fondren, the gorgeous Miss September 1977, who now does temporary secretarial work, reports that she finally stopped participating in Playboy promotions. There was "too much emphasis on sex," she explains.

Today—or, actually, by the eighties—one wonders whether sex, as it is experienced by human beings, is still the point. The current centerfolds, buck naked though they may be, communicate almost no suggestion of anything. In *Playboy* pinups, one is not looking for the note of the divine that one finds in the Venuses of ancient statuary, let alone for the pathos of Rembrandt's nudes. Nor should one ask for naturalness—a real-looking girl. That is a sentimental preference, and one that many great nudes

(Ingres's, Degas's) can refute. But what is so bewildering about the later *Playboy* centerfolds is their utter texturelessness: their lack of any question, any traction, any grain of sand from which the sexual imagination could make a pearl. Kenneth Clark, in his classic book "The Nude" (1956), repeatedly compares a period's nudes to its architecture. The Playmates of the past few decades look to me like the "cereal box" buildings that went up on Sixth Avenue in the sixties, those cold, shiny structures, with no niches, no insets—no doors, it seemed. Likewise, the current Playmates seem to have no point of entry. And wasn't entry the idea?

Perhaps, despite the continuing girl-next-door protestations, the very remoteness of these women is their attraction. Clark, in his book, speaks of the "smoothed-out form and waxen surface" of the academic nudes of the nineteenth century. Hefner's latter-day nudes have the same look: the skin like polished armor (and it is polished—a side photo of Miss June 1981 shows her getting her hip sprayed with Formula 409); the golden light; the velvet thickness of the paper. This is not so much sex, or a woman, as something more like a well-buffed Maserati.

It is clearly appealing. *Playboy* sells about three million copies a month in the United States. But three million is less than half of what the magazine's circulation was in the early seventies. Hefner has repeatedly portrayed himself as a major force in the sexual revolution—he seems to think that he and Alfred Kinsey were its prime movers—but eventually the revolution left him behind. After "Debbie Does Dallas" or "1 Night in Paris"—indeed, after Internet pornography—who needs Miss December 2004, flashing her little heinie at us from aboard a yacht? One might answer that some people prefer their sexual materials soft-core. If so, they can turn to the new "lad" magazines, such as *Maxim* and *FHM*, which show the women clothed (if barely) and, at the same time, look more up-to-date than *Playboy*.

That, in the end, is the most striking thing about *Playboy's* centerfolds: how old-fashioned they seem. This whole "bachelor" world, with the brandy snifters and the attractive guest arriving for the night: did it ever exist? Yes, as a fantasy. Now, however, it is the property of homosexuals. (A more modern-looking avatar of the Playmates' pneumatic breasts is Robert Mapplethorpe's Mr. 10½.) Today, if you try to present yourself as a suave middle-aged bachelor, people will assume you're gay. But though times have changed, Hefner hasn't. He has described *Playboy* as a projection of "the wonderful world I dig," and he has gone on innocently digging it no matter what. In 1967, he moved the corporation's offices into a thirty-seven-story skyscraper—which, to the grief of the city fathers, beamed the name Playboy, in bright lights, over Chicago's skyline—but he almost never went to the office. He stayed in the Mansion, and sent his employees memos. When a face-to-face meeting was absolutely necessary, it was held at the Mansion. In Russell Miller's thorough and unadmiring book "Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy" (1984), Robert Gutwillig, a vice-president of the corporation, says that the purpose of these gatherings, as far as Hefner was concerned, was just to let the editorial staff blow off steam, after which, he hoped, they'd go away and leave him alone for another few months. According to Art Paul, the magazine's longtime art director, one of Hefner's girlfriends would sometimes call in the middle of the meeting, and then the boss excused himself: "We'd sit there waiting for him while he got laid." Frequently, however, what he wanted was just to get back to the Mansion's game room. Hefner is addicted to games: pinball machines, electronic games, board games. He likes to do forty-hour Monopoly marathons, fuelled by Pepsi (of which, it has been said, he used to consume three dozen bottles a day) and Dexedrine. Often, the meetings cut short by these exigencies had to do with the competition, but Hefner, unlike his staff, doesn't seem to have cared much about the competition. When *Penthouse* went "pink"—that is, began photographing what was between the labia majora—*Playboy* refused to do so. As for the insurgents on the other side, he hired the former executive editor of *Maxim* to make suggestions about pitching *Playboy* to younger readers, but this man lasted less than two years. Hefner liked the magazine the way it was.

Over the years, he has become a kind of Howard Hughes recluse, if less eccentric. In 1971, he bought a second mansion, in Los Angeles, and, indifferent to the fact that the magazine's headquarters were half a continent away, he enclosed himself there more or less permanently. He wasn't hiding, though; he welcomed camera crews. In the magazine, and in *Playboy's* books and on its Web site, we see him tooling around the manor, in his trademark silk pajamas, with a posse of blondes in tow. And he wants us to know that though he is seventy-nine, he is not just playing Monopoly with these women. In his most recent publishing venture, "Hef's Little Black Book" (2004, co-authored with Bill Zehme), we are offered a chapter on "making love like the master." He recommends Viagra: "There's always a time when you're looking for wood." Another tip: "It is a good idea not to fall asleep while you're actually having intercourse."

How long can this story go on being told? Maybe for a long time, on the electronic media. By the mid-eighties, Hefner's corporation had closed down its Playboy clubs and resort hotels, but it has since spawned an ambitious "entertainment" division, consisting of Internet programming, pay-per-view and subscription TV, radio, DVDs and home videos. This division now supplies sixty per cent of the corporation's revenues. As for the magazine, the surprise is not that it has lost fifty per cent of its readers but that, outdated as it is, it has lost only that many, and that the faithful are not all in nursing homes. (According to a 2005 market study, the readers' median age is thirty-three.) A good comparison, made recently in *Time*, is with *Mad*, which was launched a year before *Playboy* and was as much a product of the fifties as Hefner's publication. *Mad* is still in print, but with one-tenth the circulation it had in the early seventies. Next to that, Hefner's half a loaf looks pretty good. It looks even better when you consider that, while all print media are suffering in the face of electronic competition, no sector of old-style journalism has been more vulnerable than men's magazines. Unlike, say, book reviews, sex lends itself to the screen, and, God knows, it has prospered there. (Sex sites, it has been estimated, account for forty per cent of all Internet traffic.) *Penthouse* only lately emerged from bankruptcy hearings. Meanwhile, *Playboy* is still the best-selling men's magazine in the United States. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Intuition, *by Allegra Goodman (Dial; $25).* This intimate portrait of life in a research institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, revolves around a scientific mystery: the groundbreaking, too-good-to-be-true discovery of a virus that fights cancer. Cliff, the rakish, headstrong post-doc responsible for the discovery, is on the verge of dismissal when his tumor-ridden mice exhibit stunning rates of remission; meanwhile, Cliff's co-worker and former girlfriend, spurred by personal and professional jealousy, begins to harbor suspicions about his lab work. The somewhat transparent plot is made compelling by the aesthetic delicacy of Goodman's writing—furless lab mice are "like quivering pink agar"—and by the care with which she sketches the social world of the lab. The omniscient narrative nimbly shifts perspective among a small number of complex characters, to produce a Rashomon-like inquiry into truth and motive.

In the Company of the Courtesan, *by Sarah Dunant (Random House; $23.95).* Dunant's latest historical romp follows the fortunes of a beautiful, flame-haired courtesan, Fiammetta Bianchini, who, after escaping from the 1527 pillage of Rome, sets up shop in Venice. The novel, narrated by Fiammetta's servant, a dwarf, chronicles the pair's horrific scrapes and their dizzying triumphs, which include Fiammetta's becoming Titian's model for his "Venus of Urbino." Along the way, Dunant presents a lively and detailed acccount of the glimmering palaces and murky alleys of Renaissance Venice, and examines the way the city's clerics and prostitutes alike are bound by its peculiar dynamic of opulence and restraint.

Mozart's Women, *by Jane Glover (HarperCollins; $27.95).* Glover, a respected British conductor, views Mozart through the women in his life: his mother; his sister and sometime duet partner, Nannerl; his wife, Constanze Weber; and the female singers for whom he wrote roles that are "some of the most vividly drawn and brilliantly understood women on the operatic stage." Mozart seems to have had more in common with the happily domestic Figaro than with the brilliant seducer Don Giovanni, and knew how to appreciate a talented, vivacious, and resourceful woman, as Glover illustrates with many touching excerpts from his correspondence. However, after Mozart's death, in 1791, her book begins to drag as she follows the lives of his survivors; Constanze remarried, completing her second husband's biography of her first, and lived until 1842. The book's title notwithstanding, much of the first half is dominated by Leopold Mozart, Wolfgang's authoritarian and manipulative father, who emerges as probably the most significant person in Mozart's life.

A Dash of Daring, *by Penelope Rowlands (Atria; $29.95).* In 1920, the thirty-three-year-old Carmel Snow was whisked from her mother's high-society dressmaking shop to be assistant fashion editor at *Vogue*. In 1932, she defected to *Harper's Bazaar*, and presided there until 1957, becoming an industry legend (she received the Légion d'Honneur for her support of French couture). Snow not only spotted trends but created them, using the magazine to boost designers such as Balenciaga, styles like the sack dress, and talents from Richard Avedon to Truman Capote. Rowlands's finely researched biography is a frothy read—like leafing through decades' worth of fashion magazines—but Snow, however charming, had a darker side: she was ruthless in pursuit of her goals, largely ignored her society husband and docile daughters, and drank prodigiously. When in Paris, it was said, she lived on "martinis, French pastries, and vitamin B injections."

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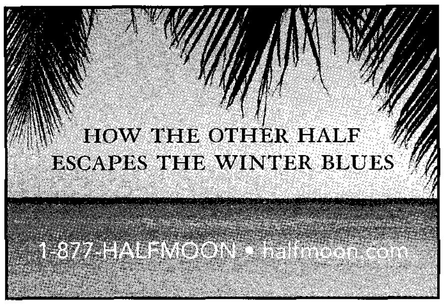

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THE SKY LINE

MYSTERIOUS SKIN

Herzog and de Meuron's otherworldly stadium in Munich.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Most sports stadiums that have been built in recent decades are hulking concrete monoliths or cute exercises in nostalgia, and they give the impression of having been crafted either by highway engineers or by theme-park designers. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, whose firm won the Pritzker Prize in 2001, appear quite determined to be architects, and that is why it is remarkable that the Swiss team was invited to create two of the most conspicuous sports venues in the world: the recently completed Allianz Arena, in Munich, which will house this year's World Cup of soccer; and the Olympic Stadium in Beijing, which is now under construction and will be the centerpiece of the 2008 Summer Games. Both designs suggest that a sports arena, for all the blood and sweat on the field, can be an exalted space of otherworldly beauty.

The Allianz Arena has a delightfully surreal appearance. The exterior is covered in tufted, translucent material; viewed from afar, the stadium resembles a giant, quilted doughnut. At night, it becomes positively radiant: the façade is lit from within, which means that the entire arena glows. (The windows of a hundred and six luxury boxes can be partially discerned behind the curved scrim.) On most evenings, the building emits a soft white light, reflecting the silvery tone of the synthetic skin, but on nights when one of the two Munich soccer clubs has a home game—the teams share the stadium—it changes its skin color: red for Bayern Munich, blue for the Munich Lions. The shifting lighting schemes atop the Empire State Building seem timid compared with this chameleon.

The arena retains its allure during the day. The unusual material—ETFE, or ethylene tetra fluoro ethylene—gives the stadium a cushiony texture, as if it were an oversized, permanently moored blimp; you want to climb up and touch it. And its subtle white hue eerily duplicates the Munich sky on a cloudy winter afternoon—the stadium practically disappears. In the sun, it brightens. The 2,760 tufts—made of two sheets of ETFE, each 0.2 millimetres thick, which are sewn together and filled with air—are arranged in a strict diamond pattern, giving the façade a subtle sleekness. There are obvious jokes to be made about the Allianz Arena—one could say that it resembles the Michelin Man, or even a soccer ball—but Herzog and de Meuron are too good to play trite visual games, and the building easily transcends such literal-minded comparisons.

The Allianz Arena also serves its function superbly. The membrane-like roof, which is retractable, permits ultraviolet light to filter through, allowing the natural turf on the playing field to thrive. Nineteen of the exterior tufts tilt open on days when a breeze is welcome. The stands, arrayed on three tiers, are unusually steep, creating nearly flawless sight lines; the elegant gray seats, curved and comfortable, look like miniature versions of the famous egg chairs by Arne Jacobsen. Like a great opera house, the stadium seems more intimate than it is, and you feel connected to the field even if you are in the upper tier.

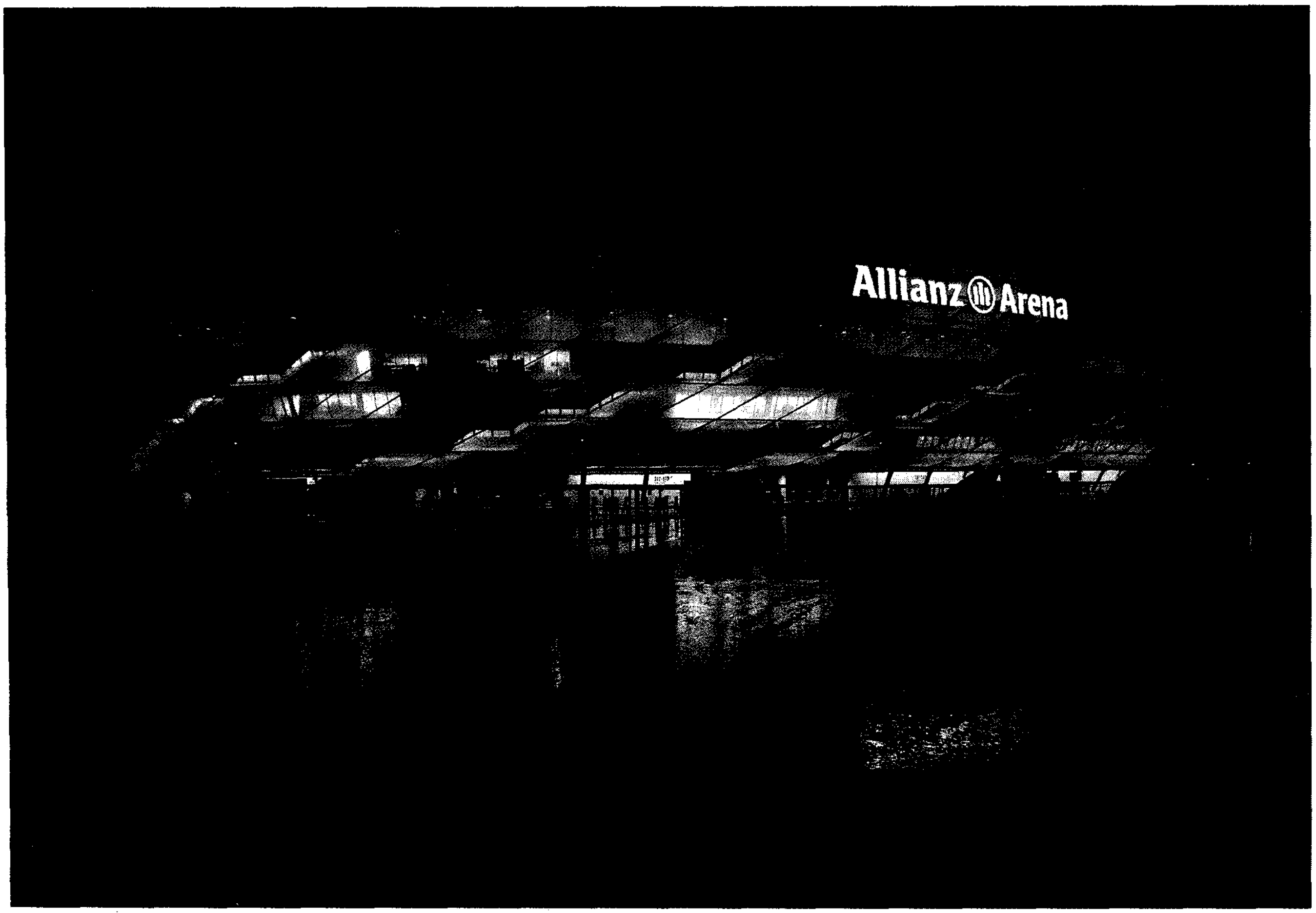
The Allianz Arena is on Munich's northern fringe, near the intersection of two Autobahns, and it is designed to be as exciting when you zip past it in your BMW as it is when you approach it on foot. It has the magnetic pull of a true icon: I was glad I wasn't behind the wheel when I rode in a car to the arena at night, since I couldn't take my eyes off its luminous form and unsettling monumentality. Buildings aren't supposed to be so huge and so soft. These days, we tend to associate softness with spinelessness, as if worthy architectural ideas had to be expressed in terms of crisp, hard form. (Think of the brutal angularities of Rem Koolhaas or Zaha Hadid.) With this gently radical stadium, Herzog and de Meuron prove that softness is not for sissies.

Unlike most American stadiums, the Allianz Arena is not surrounded by acres of parking lots, and the visual approach to the arena is as meticulously designed as anything within the building itself. Parking space is embedded in a partially sunken multilayered structure, atop which is the main pedestrian entry path to the arena. The path is lined with enormous lamps that look like hot-air balloons—whimsical echoes of the façade—and it begins at a train-and-bus station, so that people who arrive by car and those who take public transportation merge together as they walk along the elevated boulevard.

When you enter the arena, you go up one of several monumental staircases tucked between the pillowy exterior and the concrete inner structure of the stadium. The staircases curve as they rise, reflecting the rounded shape of the stadium. The stairs are one of the best things in the building. You get enticing glimpses of the angular metal framework that supports the façade as you walk up, and, at night, the colored lights create a lurid atmosphere that bears a beguiling resemblance to German Expressionism: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" transported to the realm of sport.

Oddly, one of the few significant precedents for this building is also in Munich: Frei Otto and Günter Behnisch's great Olympic Stadium of 1972, with its lyrical Plexiglas roof. Compared with the Allianz Arena, the Olympic Stadium is just a jaunty tent stretched over a conventional stadium, but it was quite something in its time, and it still looks good. Herzog and de Meuron, however, have made a more profound statement about the potential of sensual form to achieve epic grandeur, and there are no self-indulgent gestures: every aspect of their design amplifies the experience of attending a soccer game.

The supple exterior of the Allianz Arena would seem to overwhelm everything else about the building, until you go inside and discover how well it works, and how much else there is in Herzog and de Meuron's repertoire. The same thing can be said about their design for the de Young Museum, in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, which opened this past fall. The museum's façade—made up of intricately textured sheets of embossed and perforated copper—is so dazzling that you expect the building to be an empty showpiece; yet its interior is useful and intelligent. The museum is as dark as the Munich stadium is light, and as hard-edged as Munich is rounded, but in both cases Herzog and de Meuron have managed to invent a wholly new kind of exterior, and marry it to a fully realized building. They use these seductive skins to lure us into their architec-



The Allianz Arena's soft façade glows from within, and it can change colors. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

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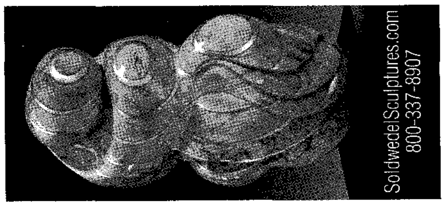

ture, but they don't leave their imaginations at the door.

The original de Young Museum, a grandiose, Spanish-colonial structure, was so badly damaged in the Loma Prieta earthquake, in 1989, that it couldn't be repaired. In 1998, the museum's trustees decided to erect a new building, and to hold a competition to find an architect. Herzog and de Meuron, who are based in Basel, had designed the Tate Modern, in London, but they were primarily known for small, minimalist spaces—such as the exquisite Goetz Collection, a private museum in Munich—and they hadn't completed any major commissions in the United States. They had, however, been among the three finalists for the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, and although their scheme was deemed too experimental for the conservative Modern, being on its short list raised Herzog and de Meuron's status. In 1999, they won the de Young competition.

The museum consists of two sections: a long, horizontal wing, containing the galleries and several internal garden courts; and an unusual tower, a kind of twisting parallelogram, containing the museum's education and study centers. The tower rises a hundred and forty-four feet, and it has an observatory room at the top. Its odd form seems willful, and it is based on an unnecessary conceit: the top section is perfectly aligned with the street grid of San Francisco, which can be seen from the observatory's windows. No matter; it's a well-wrought piece of sculpture, and the tower and the three-level main wing form a strong composition, a modern version of a cathedral and its campanile.

The remarkable pointillist façade covers both the main wing and the tower, further unifying them. It is actually a computer-generated pattern of dots, a gargantuan version of the pixels that make up a digital photograph. Such an effect could seem slick, but the building feels dignified and compellingly strange. It is smooth, like so many modern buildings, yet it is as textured as a rococo church. And do those dots make a picture of something, or are they simply ornament? They are both things at once—strictly speaking, the dots form a picture of dappled light filtering through a canopy of trees, but it comes across as a tantalizing abstraction, a color-field painting without the color.

The ambiguity of the copper façade entices you into an entry court, and, from there, into a high central lobby. The layout is irregular but clear and easy to grasp. The galleries are gracious and accommodating, with varying ceiling heights, natural light, and, in some cases, lovely views of Golden Gate Park. The twentieth-century galleries, on the main floor, have stone floors, skylights, and white walls; the upstairs galleries, which contain smaller and earlier works, have wood floors, colored walls, and, in several rooms, wooden ceilings. The tight, triangular garden courts bring the expansive landscape of the park inside, with a special intensity. Throughout the museum, the flow through space is as logically programmed as in any classical building. The art—in particular, a spectacular triptych by Ed Ruscha, commissioned for the lobby—looks superb in the variety of settings that Herzog and de Meuron have crafted for it. Walking through the de Young, you begin to wonder why we tend to think of new museums as being either potent works of architecture or sensitive environments for art, when this museum so deftly manages to be both.

Last year, Herzog and de Meuron also completed work on an expansion of the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis. The addition is clad in aluminum mesh that has been delicately crinkled, softening the most hard-edged of materials. Both museums have a kind of painstaking sensuousness. They are sombre and inviting at the same time. Can there be such a thing as Swiss passion? Herzog and de Meuron seem determined to prove that this is not an oxymoron—that utter precision need not come at the cost of emotional engagement with architecture.

Herzog and de Meuron's office in Basel, once tiny, now has a hundred and seventy employees, and they are getting all kinds of work. Ian Schrager just hired them to design a condominium project on Bond Street, in lower Manhattan, for which the architects have devised a façade that will have large plate-glass windows separated by heavy, rounded glass columns—a shimmery, twenty-first-century version of SoHo's cast-iron façades. It is a brilliant scheme, and Schrager and his partner, Aby Rosen, are building it

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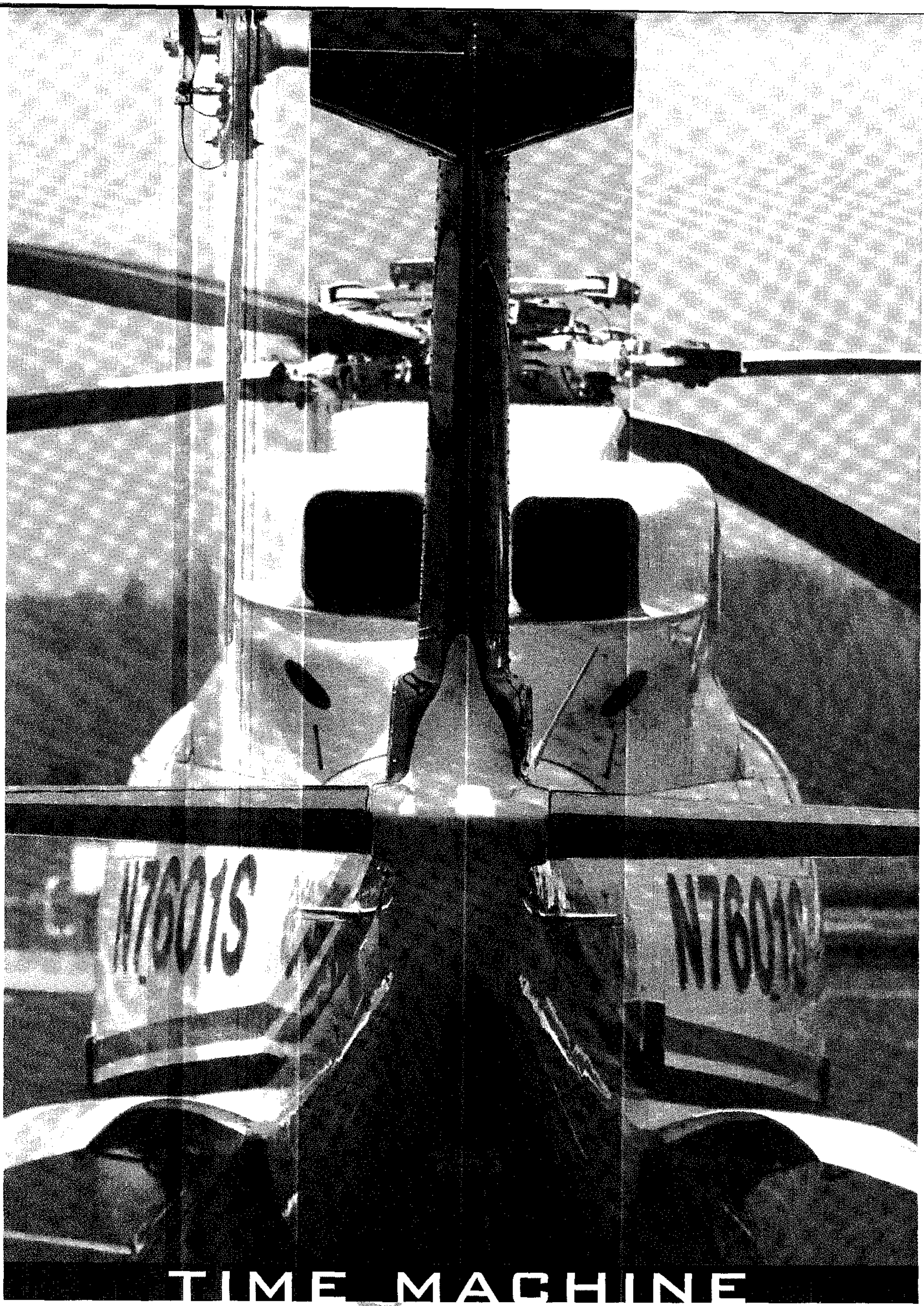

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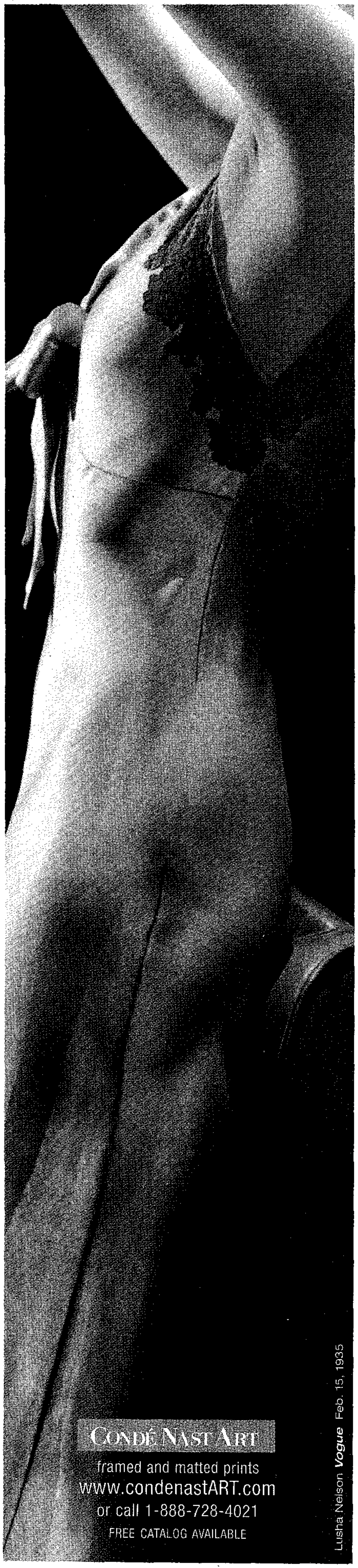
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Lusha Nelson *Vogue* Feb. 15, 1935

pretty much as the architects designed it.

Herzog, who is the firm's spokesman, has positioned himself less as an architectural theorist than as an acute observer of culture who happens to design serious buildings. The point of his practice, he told me recently, is "not just to make a beautiful object." Ambiguity, he said, lies at the heart of his designs. He wants his architecture to make a point about the human psyche. "Architecture must deal with doubt—it is not just about style, or 'I like this' or 'I don't like that,' " he said. Herzog is known for making delphic pronouncements, and his words tend to be more pensive than the sweeping absolutes that architects like Koolhaas adopt. Life is a complicated, painful business, he seems to be saying, and architecture should be neither an escape from stress nor a literal representation of it but, rather, a means of achieving complex insight. Herzog rejects the idea that architecture should provide either simple physical comfort or intellectual challenge—to him, these two things are not mutually exclusive.

I asked him about his firm's turn from the austere visual vocabulary that defines his early work. "The really interesting thing about ornamentation is the strong psychological side inherent in it," Herzog said. Ornament, as he sees it, is a reflection of the intricacies of the human mind. The Beijing Olympic Stadium, for example, will look like a vast mesh of concrete sticks, crossing one another in every direction—a network that is both literally and symbolically a web. It will be impossible to tell where structure ends and decoration begins, for they are one and the same. The result should be disconcertingly gorgeous.

"I am more interested in the dark side—the dark side inside comfort, the comfort inside the dark side," Herzog said. "It is like the films of Hitchcock—that's how life is. The dark moment, the criminal moment, the sexual moment, sits within everything else. Perhaps it is strange to hear this from someone who became known as a minimalist. But minimalism is just another guise, another form of dress." ♦

DEPARTMENT OF STRAIGHT THINKING

From the Financial Times.

On March 23, she fell into an elevator shaft. Police, who declared her death an accident, were unable to interview her.

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POP MUSIC

GHOST'S WORLD

A Wu-Tang Clan member's new album.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

I own only one piece of art depicting a musician. It's a photograph of an m.c. known as Ghostface Killah. He is smoking a cigarette and singing into an old-fashioned ribbon microphone. In his knit cap and sunglasses, he looks a bit like Frank Sinatra crossed with a jewel thief. "Fishscale," Ghostface's new album, is his fifth, and it is the most exciting record I've heard recently. This is more than a little surprising, because Ghostface is thirty-five, and rappers seldom have long careers, let alone ones in which the quality of the work steadily improves.

Ghostface, who was born Dennis Coles, is one of the nine (or ten, depending whom you count) members of the Wu-Tang Clan, a hip-hop group from Staten Island that for the past fifteen years has been one of the genre's most unpredictable and respected collectives. The band's début record, "Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)," was released in 1993, and though none of the group's four albums—or the thirty solo albums released by its members—have sold more than two million copies, the Wu-Tang Clan has accrued cultural capital rare in hip-hop. (Perhaps only the Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, and Tupac can claim equally august status.) The Wu-Tang style is sui generis, and seems especially so now, in the context of more popular hip-hop, which tends toward clean electronic sounds and simple, repetitive choruses.

Wu-Tang music sounds dirty—not just profane but unclean. The songs are overstuffed with cryptic slang and complex stories. A typical track contains a looped sample of an old soul record overlaid with squeals, beeps, echoes, and virtuosic rhyming that goes and goes, then simply stops. The group borrows words and images from kung-fu movies—the source of Wu-Tang and Shaolin, an alias for Staten Island—and each member has several, not necessarily intelligible, nicknames. Last year, one of the group's founders and its main producer, The RZA, co-authored a book called "The Wu-Tang Manual," an attempt to explain the band's use of Buddhism and martial arts, pop-culture references, and weird nomenclature. The name Ghostface Killah, for instance, is derived from a 1979 movie called "The Mystery of Chess Boxing." Not many hip-hop groups need a reader's guide.

The group has not released an album since 2001, and its live appearances are limited to occasional reunion shows, the most recent in New York being an entertaining but ragged performance in February at Hammerstein Ballroom. In 2004, Ol' Dirty Bastard, one of the band's bawdiest and most popular members, died of a drug overdose. The RZA has lately been scoring Hollywood movies—Jim Jarmusch's "Ghost Dog" and Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill" epic—and the Wu-Tang's first breakout star, Method Man, has been acting in films. He appeared in "Soul Plane" and "How High" and on a short-lived television sitcom called "Method & Red."

Ghostface Killah, though, has stuck to recording and has become the de-facto Wu-Tang standard-bearer. (He is also the only member of the group to have had a doll produced in his likeness: a limited-edition, five-hundred-dollar action figure that comes with a paisley print robe and a tiny gold chalice studded with Swarovski crystals.) Ghostface embodies the Wu-Tang dualism—the tension between the accessible and the esoteric. Some songs, including one of his highest-charting hits, "Cherchez la Ghost," from 2000, incorporate long samples of familiar old songs (in this case, Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band's 1976 hit "Cherchez la Femme"); others are larded with dissonant machine noises. Both styles complement his lyrics, which alternate between candid autobiographical vignettes and delightful non sequiturs. His voice is a gorgeous instrument, mellifluous even when he's yelling, which he does an awful lot.

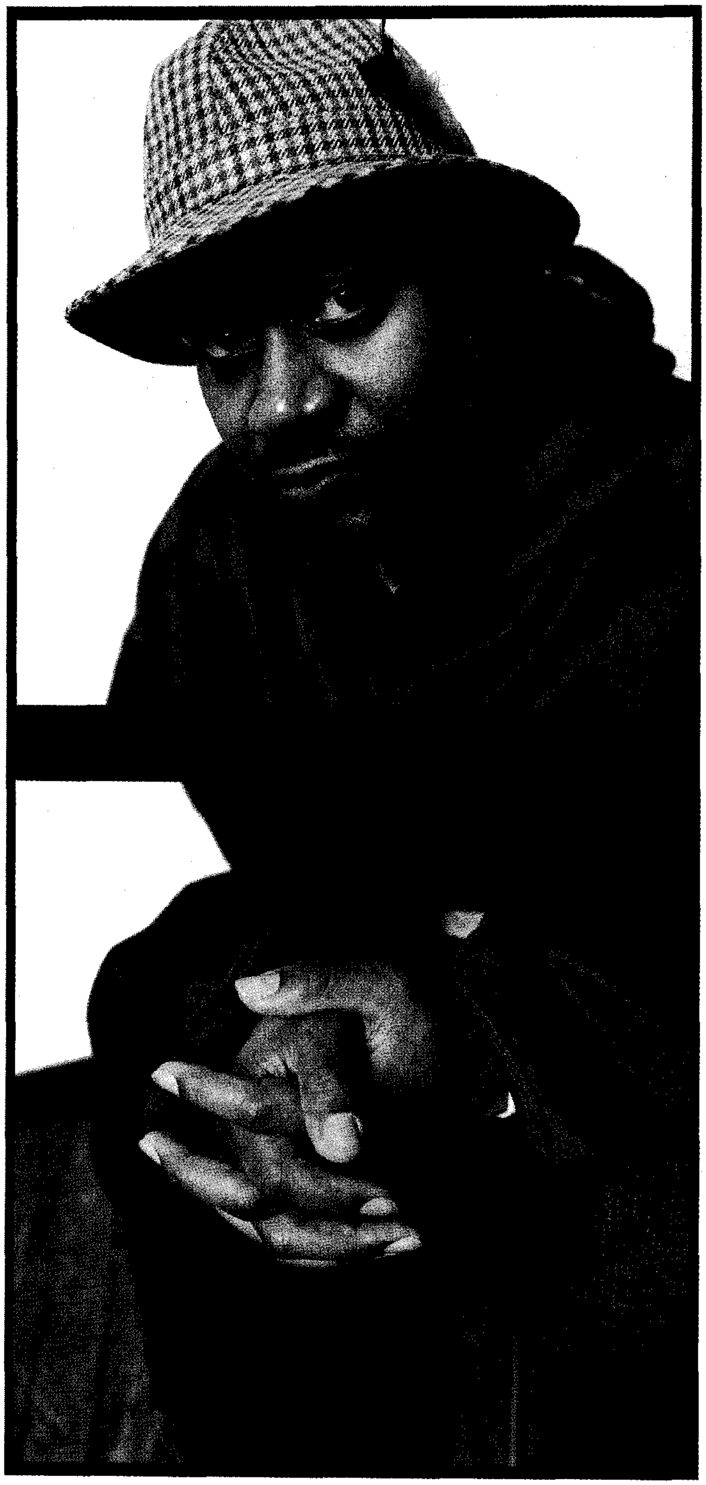
His 1996 single "All That I Got Is You" was a tearjerker about growing up poor: "Seven o'clock, pluckin' roaches out the cereal box, some shared the same spoon, watchin' Saturday cartoons. Sugar water was our thing, every meal was no thrill; in the summer, free lunch held us down like steel." By contrast, "Nutmeg," the lead track on his 2000 album, "Supreme Clientele," contains so many unrelated images, laid over a silky 1977 soul record by Eddie Holman called "It's Over," that what you take away is mostly Ghostface's joy in the sonorous possibilities of the English language: "Swing the John McEnroe, rap rock'n'roll, Ty-D-Bol, gung-ho pro, Starsky with the gumsole. Hit the rump slow, parole kids, live Rapunzel but Ton' stizzy really high, the vivid laser eye guy."

Few hip-hop artists can squeeze as many words onto an album as Ghostface, and on "Fishscale" he charges into every track, including the romantic numbers, with harried force. His lyrics sound unedited and unrehearsed—he frequently changes his mind or corrects himself from one verse to the next—but the songs aren't rushed or sloppy. He has an ear for prosaic details (what time it was when the police busted in, what show was on TV) that bring freshness to hip-hop's often rote tales of drugs, guns, and girls. "Barbershop," for example, begins with Ghostface complaining to his barber—over a female chorus crooning "You better believe it"—"Didn't I tell you don't touch the sides? I'm going bald on top!" His griping is interrupted when the police raid the shop. The customers scatter, and Ghostface raps: "And out of breath, I tossed the burgundy Tec in the bushes where it landed on the side of the 'jects. I hope the pigs don't find it; it will fuck up my rep."

The point of the song isn't what happens but that nothing much does. In "Run," a duet with the gravel-voiced New York rapper Jadakiss, which appears on "The Pretty Toney Album" (2004), the police also show up, and Jadakiss and Ghostface take off, though Ghostface isn't sure why they're fleeing: "Running through the pissy stairwells, I ain't hear nothing, bugging. Only thing I remember was a bullshit summons." (In an aside of the kind that makes Ghostface's songs great, Jadakiss adds, "I'm asthmatic, so I'm lookin' for somewhere to hide at.") Like "Barbershop," "Run" evokes a sense of permanent environmental instability.

That anxiety permeates "Fishscale." The first song, "Shakey Dog," suggests the gory opening scene of "Pulp Fiction," in double time. With an accomplice named Frank, Ghostface enters an apartment building, where he smells plantains and rice; Frank proceeds to shoot a pit bull and "put two holes in the door man's Sassoon." In "Kilo," Ghostface describes the process of producing crack cocaine in brilliantly casual dialogue, backed by the sound of a spoon stirring something in a bowl: "Yo, Sharifa, go to the store for me. I need some razors and a fresh box of baggies, the ones with the tint in them. Yo, son, turn that water down a little bit, just a little bit. Thank you. I need two waters, a Dutch, and a cranberry Snapple."

His reactions to his violent surroundings are as unexpected as his observations. In "Whip You with a Strap," an uneasy song built from a long sample of Luther Ingram's "To the Other Man," he tells of being beaten as a child by his mother. "Mama shake me real hard, then get the big gat—that's called the belt. 'Help me,' as I yelled, I'm in the room like 'huh, huh, huh' with mad welts. Ragged out, bad belt, yes, her presence was felt." And yet Ghostface apparently approves of corporal punishment: "She was famous for her slaps, and to this day she's on it. But when I was a little dude, her son was a little rude. . . . Nowadays kids don't get beat, they get big treats—fresh pairs of sneaks, punishment's like 'Have a seat.' "


Ghostface Killah in New York. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

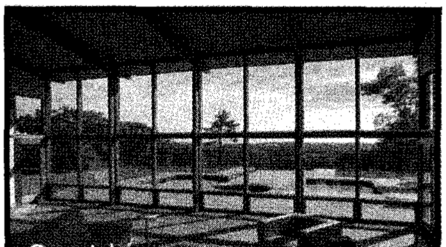
And what to make of "Underwater," a lighthearted and goofy song produced by the rapper and producer MF Doom, who is responsible for four of the album's twenty-three tracks? The sound is odd and noisy, reminiscent of early Wu-Tang songs produced by The RZA. Flutes swoop around the beat and gurgling water punctuates Ghostface's ungangsterlike reverie of being "lost underwater": "Amazed that I'm not drowning, butterflies took control when I arrived. I opened the door—No, I knocked first." (Ghostface likes to interrupt himself.) He swims past fish, ogles "pearls on the mermaid girls, Gucci belts that they rock for no reason, from a different world," and sees SpongeBob SquarePants sitting "in the Bentley coupe," listening to the Isley Brothers. It's not exactly a song for kids—a more commercially minded rapper might have made it less weird—but Ghostface doesn't seem to care about tailoring his music to the market.

Last fall, in the middle of a riveting show at B.B. King's, Ghostface asked a member of the stage crew to turn on a blue light. The d.j. put on "My Ebony Princess," a 1977 single by Jimmy Briscoe & the Little Beavers, and Ghostface began to sing along: "Your eyes are dark as the night." He stopped, listened to the record for a few seconds, and began talking about how his parents had conceived him while listening to this kind of soul music. Then he told the d.j. to stop the music. "For those that don't have no soul, y'all wouldn't really understand or know where the fuck I'm coming from when I play shit like that," he said. "See—I was born in 1970, yo. You know what, I'm a seventies man, a Taurus and shit, and I love, like, shit like that. I'd rather write to shit like that than hip-hop any day." ♦

NEATEST TRICK OF THE WEEK

From a Boston Globe obituary of the chef and author Edna Lewis.

Ms. Lewis grew up in Virginia on her family's farm, and she described the dinners she made from things she harvested in the books she later wrote.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by Philip Blackpeat

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THE THEATRE

STURM UND DRANG

Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton take on Ibsen.

BY HILTON ALS

Cate Blanchett is a very beautiful woman. With her erect posture, almond-shaped eyes, and slim-hipped frame, the thirty-six-year-old Australian-born actress resembles a Nordic Galatea, or the regal figurehead at the prow of a ship. But, instead of being awash in waves and sun, Blanchett—in her film roles, at least—is awash in delicacies of emotion: repressed rage, embarrassment, fear. Her alabaster skin flushes with the effort to contain the vulgarity of feeling that sometimes overwhelms her characters. For her 2004 Oscar-winning performance as Katharine Hepburn in Martin Scorsese's "The Aviator," Blanchett was given the chance to indulge what many of her previous directors had ignored: her grand physicality. Dressed in slacks and fur coats, she strode across Hollywood's manicured lawns like a nervous but self-possessed feline, sniffing the air for luxury. She didn't so much imitate Hepburn as riff on the Hepburn persona, with its blithe self-regard, its steely ambition offset by self-mocking laughter, its Puritan distrust of sentimentality.

Perhaps it's not so strange, then, that, two years after the film premièred, Blanchett is still playing Hepburn—though now she's playing Hepburn playing Hedda Gabler, in a Sydney Theatre Company production (at the Brooklyn Academy of Music). In Andrew Upton's streamlined adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's 1890 text, we find ourselves less in the playwright's horrifying world of domestic terror, manipulation, and shame than in another Hepburn vehicle: Philip Barry's 1939 drawing-room comedy, "The Philadelphia Story." Like that musty romp—it's Coward lite—Upton's version of "Hedda Gabler," directed here by Robyn Nevin, is long on action and laughs, with some nice costume changes, and an alluring, fashion-conscious woman at its center.

The scene: Jörgen Tesman's drawing room. Ibsen describes it as "well furnished, in good taste, and decorated in dark colours." Tesman (the perfectly cast Anthony Weigh) is a youngish scholar who is researching a book about the history of civilization. But, in a sense, he has a lot to learn about being civilized. After all, he's just returned from a six-month honeymoon with his new wife, Hedda, whose foul resentment, disregard for others, and contempt for intelligence, even her own, mark her as something of a savage. When Hedda appears onstage for the first time, interrupting her husband's happy reunion with his aunt, Juliane (Julie Hamilton), she finds him exclaiming over an old pair of slippers that Juliane has saved for him. In the classic English translation of the play, by Una Ellis-Fermor, Hedda responds with dry wit: "Oh yes. I remember you often spoke about them while we were away." In Upton's text, her opening gambit is reduced to blatant disdain. Tesman asks her to look at his aunt's gift, and she says abruptly, "I'd rather not." Thus, from the opening scene, Upton dispenses with the various nuances of Hedda's character—part of her enduring greatness is that we will never entirely understand her—and leaves us in the company of a woman whose cutting speech is as small-minded as the circumstances in which she finds herself.

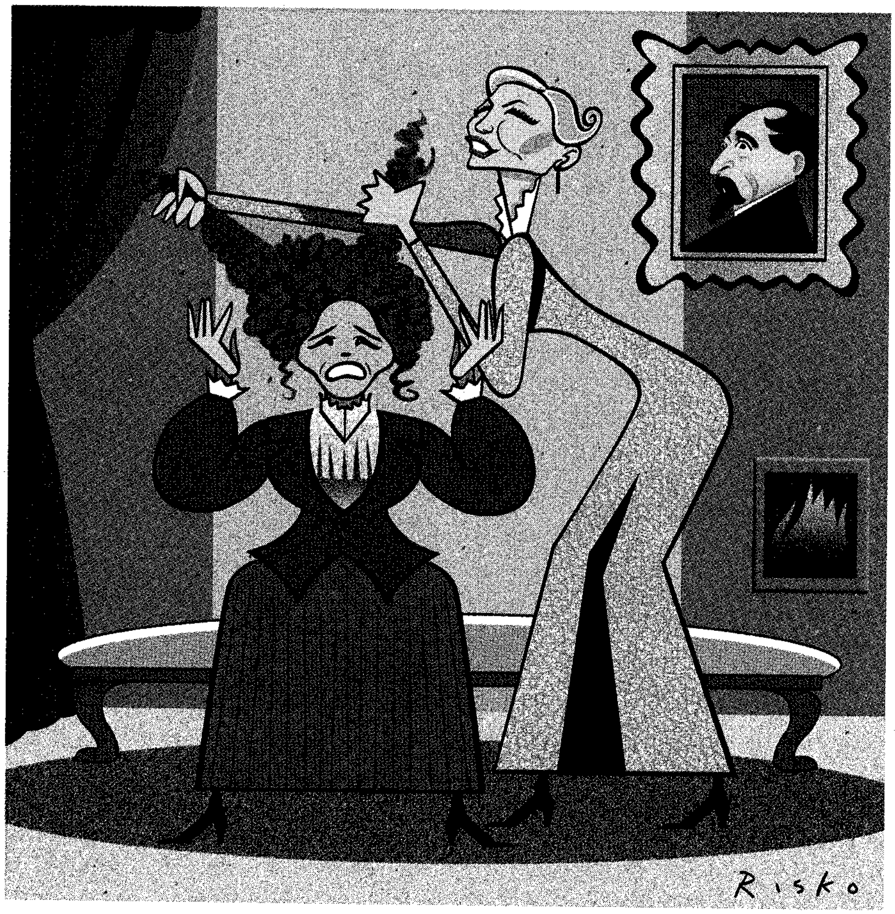
In one of the more exceptional readings of the play, Elizabeth Hardwick describes Hedda as a creature of style, meaning that her distinction lies in her obsessive regard for the way things look. Hedda does not notice her husband's inner qualities; all she can see is his slippers. Nor can this general's daughter accept the gemütlich atmosphere that Tesman has cultivated—among other things, she complains about the proliferation of flowers in Tesman's drawing room. (This line, too, is excised from Upton's adaptation.) Because Hedda has not decorated Tesman's house herself, it becomes for her a provincial nightmare. And because Tesman is too blind to know what he has got into by marrying Hedda, she will force him to see it, by removing the delicate antimacassars from his sofas and chairs. This Blanchett does with strident efficiency. Her dramatic physical gestures are intended to cover up the holes in Upton's adaptation, but they don't: they only render her slightly ridiculous, like a petulant cartoon character.

As Tesman sees his aunt to the door, Hedda is left onstage alone for a moment. "Hedda crosses the room, raising her arms and clenching her hands, as if in fury," Ibsen writes. It's the marvellous "as if in fury" that provides a clue to Hedda's unfathomable rage. Reared, we assume, in the spartan fashion of a military brat, Hedda is also a nineteenth-century woman, unable to scream or to act out her rage: what man would have her if she shrieked the truth? And, if no man would have her, where would she be? She has no money of her own. Besides, as a member of the bourgeoisie, she cannot go through life as a single woman: no one likes a female who will not join the herd.

In this scene, Nevin, instead of having Blanchett raise her fists, has her trip over one of Tesman's footrests. Yes, yes, we get it: the domestic obstacles that Hedda must overcome are really her various internal hindrances—the metaphorical furniture of her sick mind. But if Hedda cannot reveal to us the foundations of her anger, how can she convince us that she is more than a spiteful child, adept only at making the less crafty around her uncomfortable?

Further drama arrives in the person of Thea Elvsted (the sensational Justine Clarke). A former schoolmate of Hedda's, Thea has left her husband and her children to pursue a wild and reckless writer and philosopher named Ejlert Lövborg (the handsome Aden Young). The trusting Thea is unaware that years earlier Hedda met and rejected the alcoholic Lövborg, with whom she remains obsessed. (Tesman is also obsessed with Lövborg, who is his rival for a coveted academic position.) The question of why Hedda couldn't make a go of it with Lövborg hangs in the air for the rest of the play. Ibsen provides no answers, but he has shown us enough of Hedda by now for us to guess: if she had married Lövborg, she would have had to compete with him, and she would have lost. Lövborg, and not his dyspeptic wife, would have been the magnetic, celebrated member of the relationship.

In any case, Hedda gains Thea's confidence, with a result that Hedda both craves and fears: Lövborg's return. Ibsen here shows us the ways in which women can work for and against each other in the fight for male approval. He also shows us that that male approval may have less to do with gender than it does with power. Thea recalls that, when they were at school, Hedda tried to burn her hair and bullied her—brutalities that seem to have fascinated the girlish Thea, who equated any physical action with seduction. Rather than develop these erotics of power through language, as Ibsen does, however, Nevin has Blanchett literally wrestle Clarke to the ground.



Justine Clarke and Cate Blanchett as former schoolmates in "Hedda Gabler."

ROBERT RISKO

Clarke is a superlative Thea, reminiscent of the young Barbara Harris—befuddled and tender. Blanchett is no match for her subtlety and heart. When, near the close of the play, Hedda burns the manuscript that Thea and Lövborg assembled together—"I am burning your child," she famously remarks—Blanchett slams the door of the oven and whips around, her profile spotlit. With this exaggerated, drag-queenish gesture, she loses whatever credibility she may have tried to generate before. And yet this, like every other hallmark of her performance, is not entirely her fault. She has been badly directed, and she is ill-served by a script that seeks less to unravel Hedda's ultimate tragedy than to explore Upton's ideas about naturalism in the theatre. (Upton and Nevin would have done well to take a look at Trevor Nunn's 1975 film adaptation of the play, starring the exceptional Glenda Jackson, if they wanted to see what one should and should not tamper with in the text.) Obviously, both playwright and director were hoping to make the show new. But instead of going all the way, as the Wooster Group would have done, they have simply transplanted a very contemporary film actress to nineteenth-century Norway. Blanchett may sell tickets, but her "Hedda" is, unfortunately, just another victim of what the critic Kennedy Fraser called "mental fashion," which "is by nature restless—bent on promoting, and profiting by, constant novelty." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

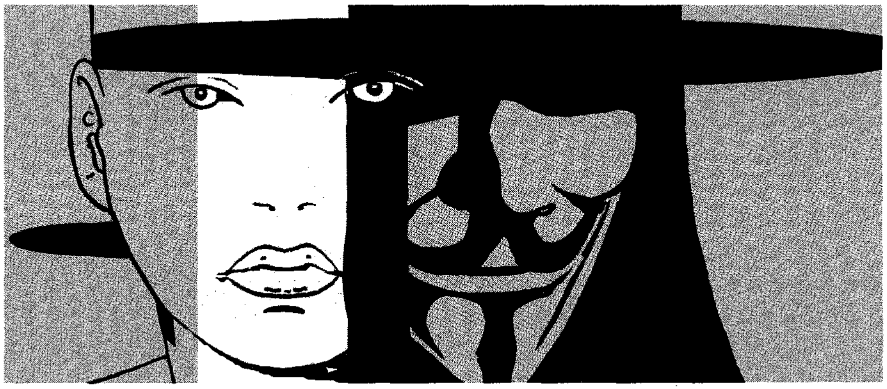
BLOWUP

"V for Vendetta."

BY DAVID DENBY

"V for Vendetta," a dunderheaded pop fantasia that celebrates terrorism and destruction, is perhaps the ultimate example of how a project with modest origins becomes a media monster. The prehistory of the movie begins in England, in 1981, with a gloomy but excitingly drawn series that was concocted by the writer Alan Moore and his illustrator-collaborator, David Lloyd, and initially appeared in the magazine *Warrior*. By the time Moore and Lloyd finished the series, in 1988, and it was collected and published as a graphic novel, Margaret Thatcher had been elected for a third term. Moore, in an introduction to the book, insisted that "the government has expressed a desire to eradicate homosexuality." He also said that "the tabloid press are circulating the idea of concentration camps for persons with AIDS." As far as one can tell, Moore and Lloyd's work was fuelled by the British left's disgust with Thatcher's policies, combined with imaginary menaces culled from antic British tabloids. Setting their story in 1997, they projected a fascist future for England and a rebel hero, in a Guy Fawkes mask, who blows up Parliament and the Prime Minister's residence.

Pop cannibalizes and regurgitates everything, including history, and in normal circumstances only a literal-minded prig would treat graphic novelists or big-screen fantasists as if they had any responsibility to truth. But events overtook this pop apocalypse on the way to the malls. Scheduled for release last November, "Vendetta" was temporarily shelved, according to its distributor, Warner Bros., "to accommodate the film's post-production schedule." The delay, however, was announced in August, a month after Islamist terrorists bombed the London subway and buses. The filmmakers, whatever their intentions, hit reality with an embarrassing thud. At this point, a few simple questions need to be asked of them, such as, What in the world are you doing? It may be relevant to point out, for instance, that Guy Fawkes, who is at the emotional center of the movie as well as of the graphic novel, was no liberator but a Catholic dissident who, in 1605, wanted to destroy the Protestant aristocracy by blowing up the House of Lords and killing King James I. Captured beneath Parliament with thirty-six barrels of gunpowder, Fawkes was tortured and hanged, and, ever since, on November 5th (the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot), he has been burned in effigy all over England in celebrations both merry and ironic. If Guy Fawkes has become a sympathetic figure, it's his failure—his incompetence as a mass murderer—that has made him so.



Natalie Portman and Hugo Weaving are trapped in a future totalitarian state.

ISTVAN BANYAI

The Wachowskis, Andy and Larry, wrote an adaptation of the Moore-Lloyd material in the mid-nineties, but put it aside for a decade to work on their "Matrix" trilogy. Taking it up again, they moved the period of "Vendetta" to around 2020, and installed their "Matrix" protégé James McTeigue (he was an assistant director on those films) as the director. In "Vendetta," America has collapsed under the strain of terror, plague, and civil war, and England has been taken over by a totalitarian dictator, Adam Sutler (John Hurt). A goateed ranter intruding into people's lives on a big screen, Sutler sustains an atmosphere of endless crisis in order to justify his iron rule. In the prison camp that England has become, the airwaves are dominated by a racist, hate-filled commentator, and all culture—including pop standards, books, and old movies—has been eliminated. Art is kept alive, barely, in the "shadow gallery," an underground vault in which the rebel, V (Hugo Weaving), lives and plots revolt.

V was thrown into a detention center years ago and disfigured by a fire in its experimental lab, and now he seeks revenge. A fast-moving dandy, he hides his face and body behind a black cape and a smiling Guy Fawkes mask; he keeps everyone at bay with a teasing verbal dexterity that hovers between the awesome and the tedious. When he saves a young woman in the street, Evey (Natalie Portman), from being assaulted by government thugs, he treats her to a rapid alliterative patter ("A vendetta held as a votive, not in vain"), and Portman does a disbelieving double-take—the movie's only funny moment. V is into Shakespeare, too, and, like a windy ham actor in his dotage, quotes "Macbeth" at every chance. Acting behind the mask, Weaving (Agent Smith in the "Matrix" series) seems to be doing an imitation of James Mason in his most hyper-civilized and elocutionary roles, though Mason was acidly witty, and Weaving is merely formal and condescending. Until he fights, that is: whirling around, V unleashes knives and daggers, slicing off hands and slashing throats in furious ballets of violent revenge.

Does some of this sound familiar? The filmmakers acknowledge that they were inspired by "A Clockwork Orange," and by the rebellious, machine-gunning students of Lindsay Anderson's 1968 "If . . ." Many other sources, notably "The Phantom of the Opera," "Batman," and the "Darkman" graphic-novel series that was made into a movie in 1990, by Sam Raimi, are obvious influences. But one particular source for "Vendetta" was not so much imitated as pillaged: the puritanical tone of the English dictatorship, the omnipresent surveillance, the Big Brother figure screaming at everyone—all this has been lifted from George Orwell's "1984," with no more than a token attempt at disguise. Orwell was drawing on his experience of England during the Second World War, when every human being and teacup from Kent to Northumberland was mobilized to resist a German invasion. In "1984," he projected the bleakly austere wartime atmosphere into the future and filled it out with details from totalitarian rule in Germany and the Soviet Union. However much he invented as he created his dystopia, he was also relying on actual events and situations. What is the actuality behind "Vendetta"? The last time I looked, London seemed more like a prosperous pleasure garden than like the capital of a jackbooted, dehumanized future.

The Wachowskis clearly wanted to weigh in on current politics, so they threw in references to the Bush Administration's political use of Christianity. There's also talk of "rendition," and the secret police repeatedly throw black hoods over people's heads, Abu Ghraib style. The society we see onscreen, its civil order crushed by fear, is meant to be a nightmare vision of our own society. V may begin his rampage in search of personal vengeance, but in the end he attacks the entire system, and, as the movie tells it, the system deserves to be attacked. It turns out that the government once released a deadly plague on the British citizenry in order to pose as its savior. But this kind of comic-book paranoia doesn't seem as playful or innocent as it used to.

The movie has an elaborate visual design: gleaming red-and-black fascist splendor alternates with glowing white interiors and smudgy industrial squalor. V jumps out of the darkness, and his mask—mocking and immobile—spooks us every time. The violent passages, with steel knives flying through the air and turning end over end, are as uncanny and beautiful as similar scenes in "The Matrix." There's a big drop in excitement every time V and little Evey discuss life and art in the shadow gallery, but, all in all, James McTeigue seems just as skilled as the Wachowskis in putting together a large-scale movie. Yet even if one enjoys the craft of "Vendetta," and, viewing it as an extravagant pop myth, cuts it as much slack as possible, there's no getting around the fact that this allegedly antifascist work lusts after fire and death. At the end, V directs Evey to send a subway train filled with explosives toward Parliament, even though Sutler's headquarters are elsewhere. V wants a big bang, with lots of fireworks and the "1812" Overture.

It's true that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, but, by sticking to the blowing-up-Parliament template, the Wachowskis have stumbled into celebrating an attack against an icon of liberal democracy. No one's questioning the filmmakers' right to do any damn fool thing they want, but "Vendetta" doesn't parse. Who might it appeal to? "Matrix" lovers, certainly. And the movie's sullen, chain-clanking atmosphere connects with punk, Goth, grunge, and all the doomy tones of white teen rock for the past three decades. For aging kids stoned on pop rapture, it could be a trip. And for people driven mad by the ineptitude and folly of the Bush Administration this film may seem like a brazen romp. Only the West could have made a movie in which blowing up civic temples is a "provocative" media statement.

The country "doesn't need a building," V says. "It needs an idea." Yes, but "Vendetta" doesn't have any ideas, except for a misbegotten belief in cleansing acts of violence. How strangely doth pop make its murderous way, as V might say. The quarter-century-old disgruntled fantasies of two English comic-book artists, amplified by a powerful movie company, and ambushed by history, wind up yielding a disastrous muddle. ♦

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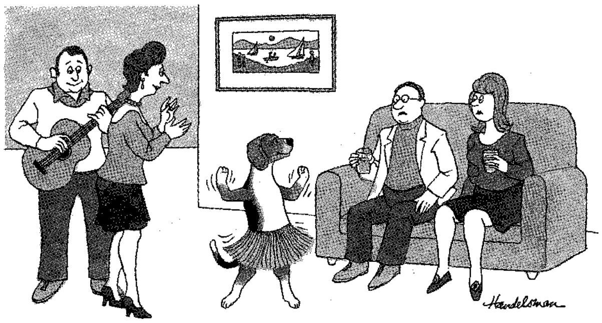
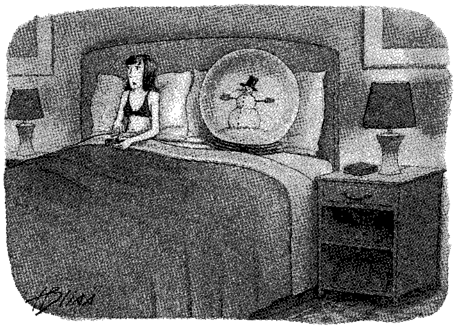
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, March 19th. Finalists in the March 6th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 3rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"That's the last time we brag about our kids."
Gloria Feinberg, Philadelphia, Pa.



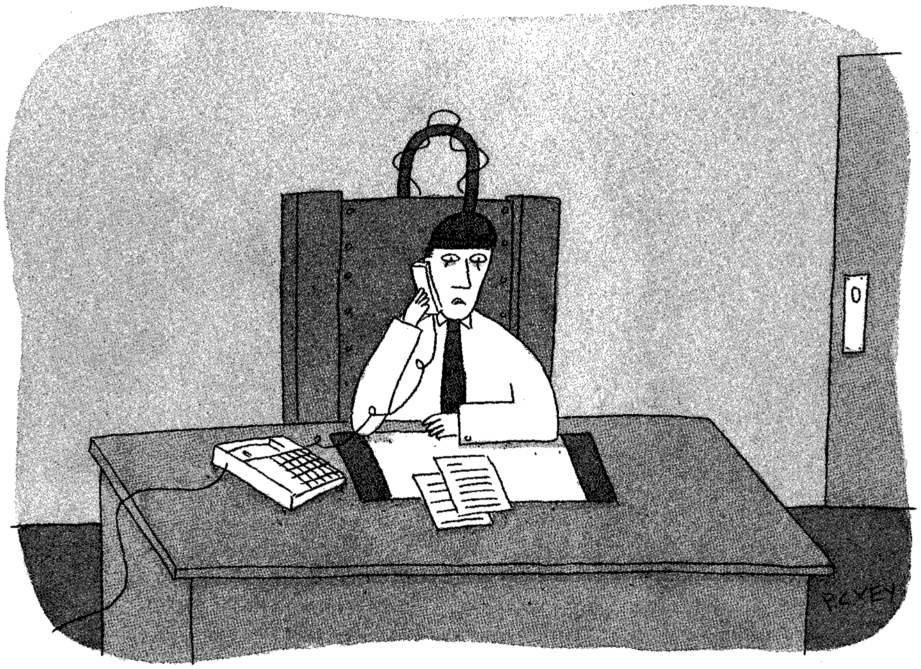
THE FINALISTS

"I think the Manhattan skyline is getting suspicious."
Louis Rubino, Burlington, Mass.

"I just wish we could talk about something other than global warming."
Don Christensen, Bend, Ore.

"Well, that was abominable."
Carl Gable, Norcross, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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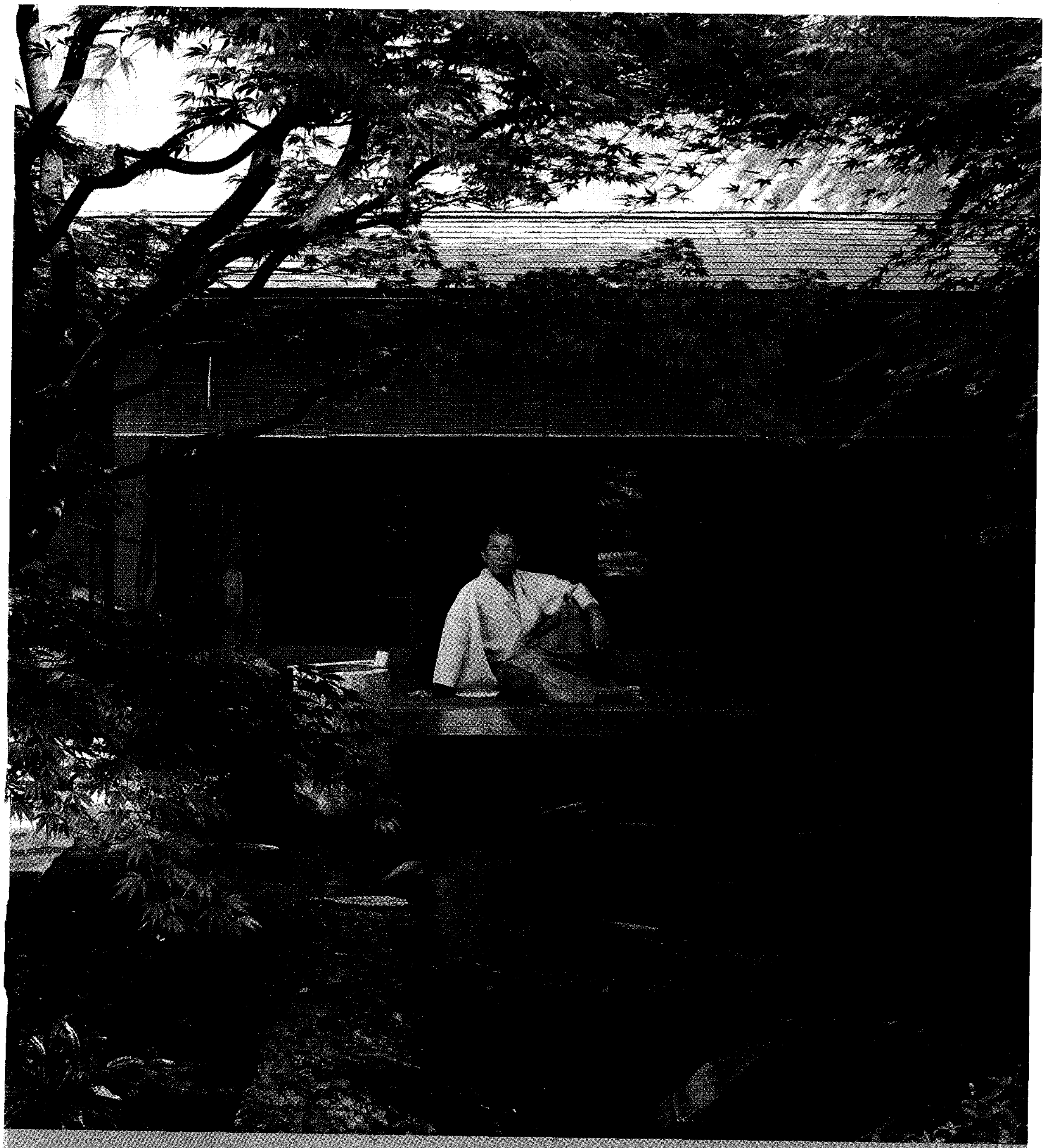

He's a fan.

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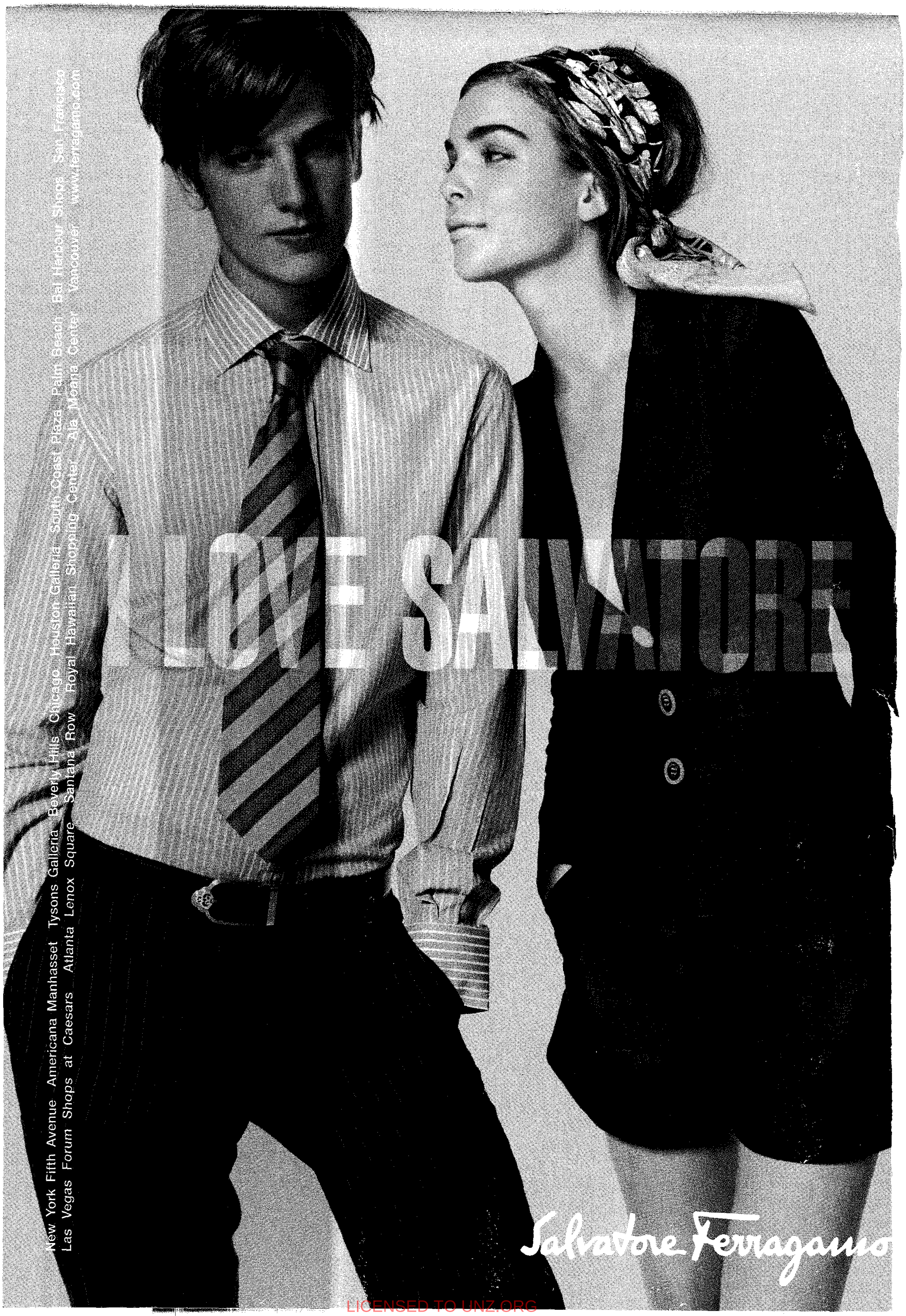
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